

STEALTHY TERROR

JOHN FERGUSON





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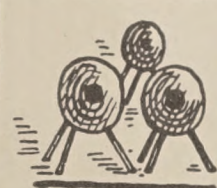
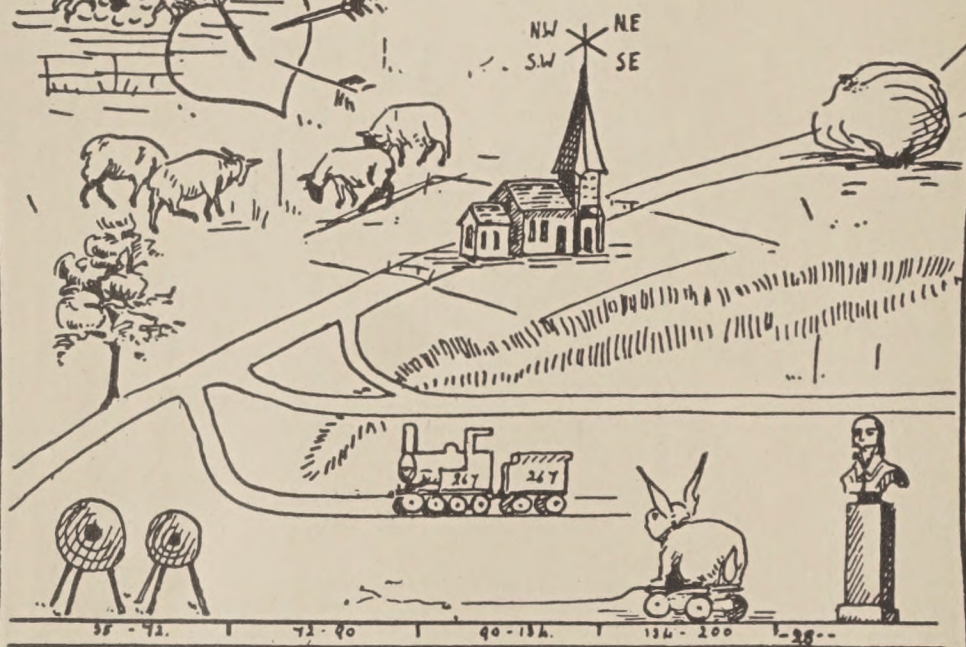
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STEALTHY TERROR



Vorden Kleinen Eitel gezeichnet
für Geburtstag seines Liebes
Vaters
August 1914.



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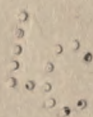
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STEALTHY TERROR

BY JOHN FERGUSON

"The stealthy terror of the sinuous pard."

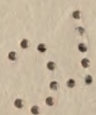
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TO
GORDON HENDERSON

SECOND LIEUTENANT, ROYAL SCOTS FUSILIERS

DEAR GORDON,

When on your way back from your short leave you came to see me here, and when, after we had talked over old friends and vanished times, you had told us some of the exploits of your glorious regiment—"at Gheluvelt, just south of the Menin Road"—some one, in the silence that followed, suggested, awkwardly enough, that I should read you the first chapter of this tale. You took the suggestion patiently, and I, being otherwise willing enough to test this attempt in a subject matter new to me, took it, as I now penitently recognise, with alacrity.

Your interest in the tale was more than I had any right to expect—certainly it was more than I deserved. And so because of your interest in it, the sincerity of which I cannot doubt—for with all the gifts of youth that are yours in abundance you have yet no natural talent for play-acting, and experience has not yet taught, and I hope never will teach you to simulate what you do not feel—because of this, then, I place your name on this book.

J. A. FERGUSON.

FOLKESTONE.

M. V. G. Apr. 26-18.

STEALTHY TERROR

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CHAPTER I

IF you leave the Friedrichstrasse at the first street beyond the Café Bauer, which is the Danzigerstrasse, and then, near the far end, take the third to the right you come on the Café Rosenkrantz. It was a queer place, queer not so much, perhaps, in itself as in the uncommon people one met there. It had an atmosphere. The casual customer who chanced to enter would not find that the saffron-faced waiter, who would ultimately approach him and take his order, while manipulating a toothpick, differed from his many thousand confrères in Berlin; and yet that stranger would be singularly insensible if he did not gather the impression that the café had a character of its own, a queer subtle flavour, an individuality that would infallibly make him think of himself as a stranger there, as if his entrance had in it something of the nature of an intrusion.

I remember the strength of that impression

when I first chanced on the place. It interested me, and I was a fairly frequent visitor afterwards; but I cannot say I ever really fathomed the café or its habitués. Obviously some of us were merely in the place while others were *of* it. There was a queer undercurrent to its surface which one might feel but never see. And frequently, sitting in my corner, I have watched such a chance visitor enter, settle down with all the outward manifestations of a man who proposed a pleasant evening for himself, and then I have seen the successive symptoms appear, a mental perturbation pass into a physical discomfort that grew, in some cases, so strong that the man could not sit still, and which often resulted in an abrupt departure.

Sometimes I felt tempted to follow one of these men and beg him to tell me what his sensations exactly were. But I never did. I knew that I would be put off with some such excuse as that they found the seats uncomfortable, or the beer indifferent.

But here it dawns on me that I am beginning this strange tale in rather clumsy fashion. Possibly a closer acquaintance with literary art, if I had it, would tell me that instead of explaining the café I ought first to explain myself. If this, indeed, be the right craftsmanship I can only say I have a confident hope that such a mistake here, as well doubtless as many others to come, will be overlooked by the reader, in consideration of

the queer story I have to tell. In any case I think I can set matters straight in a few words.

After I had graduated in medicine at Aberdeen I had, on the advice of Professor Munro, gone to Paris for a year's study at the famous Saltpêtrière with a view to specialising in mental disease. Actually I spent two years at that great institution, and six months before the date on which this narrative opens had gone on to Berlin. Not that I expected the medical schools there to teach me what the Saltpêtrière could not—that would be indeed an absurdity—but rather to apply what I had learned of the connection of mental science and therapeutics to patients so different in temperament as is the stolid Teuton from the volatile Latin.

Well, I had been going with more or less regularity for two months, or more, to the Café Rosenkrantz, and had got to know by sight most of its frequenters, and they to know me, when, quite suddenly, one night, I slipped into the whirlpool of its dark waters. It is rather odd to look back on it now and realise that on that July evening I was, little as I thought so then, entering its painted marble portals for the last time.

It was on the stroke of ten, a little later than usual, when I settled down in my accustomed corner with my pipe and lager, and drew from my pocket a little old book of Westphalian folk-songs I had that day picked up at the second-

hand bookshop that stands at the corner of the Wundtstrasse, and which I had reserved unexamined for this quiet hour. It was a fascinating book, adorned with naïf woodcuts of domestic and rural life, and, though printed in Gothic characters which made it to me rather troublesome reading, the old-world love of home and children and simple things, the unsophisticated ways, the sorrows of hopeless lovers, of which the artless verses told, had for me a charm independent of their psychological interest as records of an old Germany that had passed for ever away.

Thus engaged, it was not for some time that it dawned on me that there was something untoward afoot in the café. Vaguely I had been aware that there was a good deal of coming and going. The swing door that separated the outer chamber in which I was from the larger inner hall was always on the move. I sat and kept a quiet eye on things for a while. Now no one was entering. Evidently the audience was complete. Putting away my little volume and finishing off my beer, I crossed the floor, with, I hope, a not exaggerated air of nonchalance, and passed through the green baize swing doors into the inner room. Heaven knows what I expected to find there! What I did find was a gathering of some twenty men, seated in twos and threes round the little tables. Some of them were known to me by sight; with a few I had even ex-

changed a word or two from time to time, for I fancy that at first they were somewhat curious about me. The talking ceased abruptly on my entry and all their faces turned and looked at me in the silence. It sent a queer thrill of eeriness through me, and I stopped irresolutely, as the door swung back behind me.

The silence lasted no more than an instant. It was broken by a high-pitched voice of feminine quality, and immediately the talk of the room was again in full swing. I looked to see who it was that had been so alert and ready, and found my man in one with whose face I was familiar, but whom I had missed from the place for the last few weeks. He was of lithe, slender build, rather Jewish in features, dark, with brilliant eyes and black-pointed beard, which enhanced the whiteness of his teeth when he showed them in a smile. And as he was a most good-humoured fellow, with a smile for every one, he often showed his teeth. It seemed to me he liked doing it—a touch of vanity perhaps. They *were* good teeth. Later on he lost some of them.

Settling myself in a corner, I took up a newspaper, feeling that I was nearer than I ever had been to the café's hidden things. The atmosphere was somehow vibrant. That sudden turning of the heads, and the hush and stillness when I entered, were sufficient indication. They had expected some one very different; and they had

all expected him. They were all waiting for him; they all knew who it was for whom they waited. I did not; but I could wait also and see. As time passed, however, I became sensitive to the fact that my presence was a source of extreme discomfort to them. They were fidgety. Heads went together across the little round marble-topped tables. There was a good deal of whispering beneath the ordinary babel of comingling voices that is the note of any normal café. Over the edge of my paper I caught numerous glances directed my way, which I could not attribute to anything unusual or attractive in my personal appearance. And those glances from the pale blues and steely greys of Prussian eyes were not kind.

However, I sat tight. Every item in the newspaper was not only read but digested. I fancy I could give a good summary of that paper's contents even now, from the telegraphic news as to the political clubs in Belgrade to the editorial comments on a speech recently made, at an English by-election, on armaments, wherein the candidate called for a reversal of the *Dreadnought* programme initiated by Herr Balfour. To build more ships was, he alleged, an insult to Germany, and imperilled the cordial relations hitherto existing between the two countries. In spite of editorial approval of this statement I disagreed, for all my experience in Germany seemed to show that the only cordial relations

were those of cordial dislike, which could hardly be "imperilled" by *more* shipbuilding; and, I suspected, the foundation of Germany's grudge against us was not that we built ships but that we existed—an offence for which there seemed to be no amicable remedy.

The thought brought a smile. Then the big green baize doors opened quietly and some one stepped into the room. All faces turned simultaneously and all talk ceased, as if by some miracle every speaker had come to the end of his sentence at the same moment. In the unnatural stillness I heard the sharp indrawn breath of the new-comer, and saw his gaze pass from face to face. They might have expected him; he, it was clear, had not expected them. I saw him turn white as he looked, his eyes grew sharp, the pupils contracted to mere pin points.

"Dewinski!" he said.

"Yais," a voice answered.

There was a world of complacent amusement, and God knows what else, in that single uttered syllable. Looking for the speaker I found him to be the little Jew. His red mouth was wreathed in smiles, his teeth gleaming.

Not another word was said. The man at the door stood rigid for a full minute. Then he came forward, sat down at the table next to mine, beside the man he had called Dewinski, and the queer scene ended.

Relighting my pipe, I took up the newspaper

again and ruminated awhile—ruminated is a good word that fits the situation as I now see it—as to why the Jew had answered to his name in English, or at least what he took to be English. It was fated, however, that I was not to know the reason till a soldier told it me, on the road between Dover and Folkestone, by the Royal Oak Inn, as I remember, at the top of the hill.

Meanwhile, my neighbours at the next table were talking among themselves, but too quietly and guardedly for my comprehension. Besides Dewinski and the new-comer there were two others, an obese creature whose back, like the gable of a house, was all I could see of him, and, on his right, a man of perhaps forty years with a pitted face, adorned with the national moustache, the two ends of which pointed into the hardest pair of eyes that ever tried to stare me down. Dewinski was on the fat man's left, and between these two the face of the man they had waited for fronted me. He was a young, clean-shaven fellow, but clad in ill-fitting sloppy clothes.

It was to this group that I gave a good deal of unostentatious attention, even when my glance wandered to the others beyond. By and by it dawned on me that the man with the pale face was paying me the same compliment, in much the same manner. Once or twice for an instant our eyes met, and at first I was quick to avert my glance, not wishing to appear as a watcher. After a little of this cross play, however, it seemed to

me that he was trying to hold my look, trying almost to say something to me: there was a sort of question in his eyes.

Over the green baize double door there was a clock. It was one of those common German clocks in shape like a coffin, a child's coffin, with the white face at the top, and a glass front that showed the pendulum swinging like a grotesque pair of human legs. After a while this clock began to take a share in the attention received from the company. It was clear that an hour was approaching at which they desired to be rid of me. I wondered why one of them did not come and tap me on the shoulder and point to the door. Certainly as I yawned over that newspaper I expected some such hint, sooner or later. There was an angry *hum* in the room that reminded me of the last time I had disturbed a wasps' nest by plugging up the hole, and laying my ear to the ground to listen. At last a man on the far side got up, and, stepping on to the little dais, sat down at the piano. He had, however, got no further with his playing than the preliminary roulade of rippling notes when Dewinski interrupted:

"Frederick, my friend, no music I pray you." They all looked at Dewinski, wondering. "There is this Englishman among us," he explained.

I wondered what was coming and, I dare say, showed it. Voices rose in protest. Who cared for the Englishman? He had been too long

there; and other things were said that were undistinguishable in the guttural babel.

"He does not like music," continued the little Jew suavely. "No Englishman likes music."

There was quietness now. I felt, and they, I suspect, knew that something venomous was coming.

"The good gentleman will depart, deprive us of his company, if that pig Frederick will continue."

One or two began to laugh, but most showed mere bewilderment. Dewinski banged a fist on the table.

"You do not believe me! *Lieber Gott*, I know! The British when they have to meet any business that is very unpleasant, from which there is no escape at all, they *call* it 'facing the music'!"

And while the room rocked with laughter at this sally, and they all had something to jabber to each other about it, I was looking at the man who looked at me, the man who did not join in the merriment. I am not quite sure as to the power man has for sweeping from his mind memories that are unwelcome. I believe that impressions, even deeply lodged in the brain's convolutions, can be obliterated much more completely than is generally supposed. Of course the brain itself retains every impression that has ever been made on its texture; and in the strictest sense no man

ever forgets anything. But his power of recalling is faulty; and this power may be left unexercised in certain cases, if a man so choose. We need not put out a finger to open *that* door! True, but every life has some memory that can open the door for itself; and, at some time or other, in the silence of a wakeful night, perhaps, the door of that memory swings on noiseless hinges, and, whether we will it or no, we are face to face with some spectre of the far-off years.

It is his eyes that haunt me! Not the sharp, suspicious aspect they had when he stood with his back to the door, the pupils small, full of fear, but as they were when we looked at each other so often, when the pupils were enlarged and relaxed, when he had no fear, but only despair.

There is only one other ghost that has an equal power of presenting himself whether I will it or not—an old collie dog, who looks up at me and wags his tail while he shakes the water from his dripping body. It is curious he should choose me, for I had no hand in his death, and indeed never saw him till the time they drowned him. Still, even so, that rather strengthens my contention that there are memories over which we have no control. The memory of that dog came back to me then, as I sat in the Café Rosenkrantz. I had been wandering in the woods, a small boy of ten or so, and, coming on the deep pool they call Lady Drummond's bath, saw on the brink two or three men with

a dog. One man, the dog's master, was tying a heavy stone to the collie's neck, for he had become too old to be worth his keep. To me it seemed that the dog knew. To the bystanders he wagged his tail while the preparations went on, as if they had attended out of respect, and not for the sport of it; and when his master knelt down the better to fasten the stone to a rope—the collar being removed as a thing of some value—he licked the man's face. "Silly brute," the man mumbled, "he little kens what's what." But I think he did know. I think he was merely pretending to them he did not; for the look in his eyes belied the wagging tail, the look that was so like that of the man over there. For now I knew I stood on the brink of tragedy, and that here, once again, was one with a rope and a stone round his neck, and whose last moments were fast running out.

"Do you see the clock?"

The voice that thus burst in among my thoughts was so rasping and formidable that it made me glance at the clock before I looked at the speaker.

It was the monstrously fat man whose back had been before me all the evening. Now he was standing over the young fellow, a huge hand laid on his shoulder. No one gave the slightest heed to me, and I watched with tense interest, wondering what significance attached to the words, and what would happen next. But nothing more

was said. No one got up except Dewinski, and the man with the pitted face. Then the young man rose, and I saw that they were about to leave. He did not look towards me again. I got up myself and made my way to the door with an affectation of leisureliness. But I am sure it was lost on them. No one regarded me.

Outside I lingered on the steps to light my cigarette. There had been some rain, leaving the pavements wet so that the reflected lights of the street lamps lay on the road like a row of fallen stars. After the hot, spent atmosphere of the café the night air came fresh and bracing to the lungs. There seemed to be very few people abroad, probably the recent rain had helped to empty the streets somewhat sooner than usual, and as I stood the sound of merry bells began to fill the air. The clocks of the great city were striking, some near at hand loud and reverberant, others thin and silvery, coming from afar over the roofs in the still night.

They had not ended before I heard the shuffle of feet behind me, and Dewinski with the young man in the ill-fitting clothes and two others stepped on to the street. It amazed me that there were only four. Somehow I had expected the whole rabble. They evidently did not desire to draw attention, and when that obvious inference from their numbers had been made the thought of playing an impudent and bold part came to me suddenly. It was impossible to leave

unanswered that dumb call for help! So, without any clear plan of action, I slipped along the street after them. The only thing I could think of was to join the group with some casual remark, such as, "Ah, I see you are going my way. A pleasant evening, isn't it? Though the wind is rising, certainly."

But though I had exchanged greetings in the past with Dewinski I felt that it would be rather forcing the note, so to speak, to cut in like that. And I had to slacken my pace, as I came up behind them, so that I might get a hold of something a *little* more plausible. This seemed a desperately hard thing to do. They were only a dozen paces ahead of me now, the fat monster in front with his arm linked affectionately in the victim's, Dewinski and the other close on his heels. I was fearful that one of them might look behind and see me; but this did not happen. No doubt the two behind were fully engaged in keeping an eye on their prisoner; and from this I judged he must be a slippery customer.

In this fashion we had traversed the length of several streets. I have already remarked on the quietness of that night. What little traffic there was abroad was almost all vehicular, and the rapid footsteps of the rare pedestrian could be heard a long way off, as he hurried homewards. I took care that my own should not be heard. Indeed I was slipping round the corner of a square, the name of which was unknown to

me, when I ran straight into them, as they stood up against the railing, under the overhanging trees. It was a horrible moment, and I must have looked a fool, coming round with every manifestation of stealthy caution. They just stood there looking at me. It was enough! I felt hot all over with shame. There was no chance to carry it off, one way or another, my tiptoe pursuit was too plain evidence of my spying purpose.

Dewinski, who had been smiling, began to whistle some tune, and I could see the branches of the shrubbery behind him tapping on the iron railings, as if beating time to his flute-like notes. Then I began to laugh. His companion with a snarl of rage stepped towards me lifting his stick. But Dewinski pushing him back stepped in front of me, lifting his forefinger.

"Sir," he said, "there haf been much spoken in English newspapers of German spies in England. And I haf never seen von leedle bit in ze German about English spies in Germany. So! and yet all ze evening you haf spied on us, four gentlemen vat go home. You haf all the suspicion that come from stupidity. You haf discover a mare's nest, whatever zat is, and you, mein Herr, are ze cuckoo in ze nest. Well, if you do not want to fall into deep waters, dat is also hot water, as you say, go home and"—here he smiled genially—"schleep well in your beds."

He took his companion's arm and passed on to where the others were waiting under a lamp. His words of protest left me shaken for the moment. Had I indeed been making an ass of myself? I stood rooted to the spot in indecision, looking after them doubtfully, watching their backs as they passed under the light of the lamp at the corner. And I think I would have turned away homewards, then and there, had it not been for a little thing, a mere pin-prick, in the way of an insult, which, it seemed, the impish Jew could not deny himself. He was behind the others. Just beyond the lamp, he turned towards me, stood for a moment with the light streaming from above in a theatrical effect that no doubt was much to his taste, and with a graceful sweep of his arm blew me a kiss! Then the darkness enveloped him, and I could hear their footsteps gradually die away.

It is not really strange that one should arrive at convictions more often by seeing something done than by hearing something said. That act of Dewinski's, the simian-like mockery and malice of it, with his teeth showing, and his half-shut eyes, scattered my innate Scotch dubiety and hesitation for interfering in other people's affairs. It put my back up and set me aflame. But, above all, it gave me the conviction that they were up to some devilry with the man they had in their clutches. Go home and sleep well? There was one man they intended should sleep well that

night; but not in his bed! It was at this point that thought died in me, and I became a living mechanism for action.

When I had removed my boots and placed them carefully inside the garden railings—for they were a good pair, and I had no mind to lose them—I crossed to the other side of the road down which the gang had gone and ran like the wind after them. Along almost the entire length I went like a flying shadow. Then, when it was clear I must have overshot the party, I crossed the street and doubled back on the other side, listening for any sounds at the top of all the side streets. The quarter of the city in which I found myself was strange to me, long parallel lines of deserted streets, houses that presented no distinctive features, and none that gave any outward indication of interior life. The clouds overhead had broken up into smaller fragments as the night wore on, and a faint moonlight began to show fitfully through the edges.

The street in which I now stopped to listen ran north and south, with its east side in shadow. I was about to pass on to the next when a faint, far away sound struck my ear, and, as chances were few now, I seized on that chance and sped down the shadowed side of the street. Very soon I was close enough to hear voices in altercation, and to see a group of men on the opposite side, confronted by a policeman. He was a big fellow, and I could see the light glint on the metal

ornaments on his helmet. Cautiously I crept along, flattening myself against the wall, and in a doorway opposite drew up to await a favourable chance for intervention. At first it looked as if the officer was about to march the whole party off to the police station. They had in some way offended him—not a very difficult matter in Berlin—and his big voice boomed at the Jew's low expostulations. I imagine, from what afterwards happened, that it was something their prisoner had said or done, and I judged that things must be getting rather desperate from his point of view.

Finally, however, Dewinski's suave manners seemed to prevail. The policeman's voice dropped into a low rumble that showed me the crisis was over; his helmet nodded final admonitions, and he was passing on his way when there was a sudden scuffle in the group—some one burst from them, and struck the policeman a resounding smack on the face. It must have been done with the open palm, from the noise it made; but, according to British ideas on the subject, it was no sort of crack to give a policeman, combining, as it did, the maximum of insult with the minimum of damage. When I saw it was the little man, their prisoner, who had struck the blow I thought things were getting even more queer than ever. They were on him like a flash, dragging him back. The big policeman, after staring like an astonished bull in stupid surprise, gave

a roar of anger and dashed for his man, tearing him like a rag from their grasp.

When Dewinski and the others came round in front, and the policeman drew his sword and waved them off threateningly, I began to see daylight: the little chap had intended his blow to insult but not to injure! He wanted to get himself arrested; therefore he had less to fear from the police, at all events *that night*, than from the others. At first it looked as if his ruse would be crowned with success. The officer snapped a handcuff on his prisoner, and set off for the station as soon as the others had fallen back from his sword's point. And, since the prisoner gave no trouble, the pace was quite brisk. The others followed, Dewinski cursing softly, and the fat man soon showing symptoms that the pace was too hot for him.

We were in another street now, and from behind I could see that the trio were much alarmed at this unexpected turn the affair had taken. They pulled up and their heads went together in consultation. Then the third man, the fellow with the pitted face, detached himself and went speeding along the street on the right. The Jew and the fat man hurried along again after their quarry, and I made sure as I quickened my own pace that something nasty was brewing. It was wonderful how that mountain of flesh moved so swiftly and noiselessly. There was something weirdly ominous in it, more ominous even than

the stealthy cat-like progress of the Jew, who ran with little steps by his side. I am sure the other two heard nothing as they came up behind. They were in the middle of the road, in the full moonlight, for now the moon had emerged from the welter of clouds, and the street lay a long sharply cut contrast of light and shadow.

Dewinski was on the policeman's back with the agility of a panther, arms locked round the neck, and his knee driving into the small of the man's back. He came down like a stricken ox under the butcher's pole-axe, and the small sword spun out of his grasp and fell clanging on the hard road. The moment he was down the fat man, with a run and a jump, landed on the man's prostrate body. There was no cry, not even a groan.

Save for the clatter of the sword, it was all as noiseless as if the man had been stricken down by a grotesque bulky shadow, suddenly become ponderable.

The two scoundrels were busily engaged rifling the person of their whilom prisoner, who had fallen with his captor, and, it appeared, had shared in his injury. My rush was noiseless, and I imagine it was my preceding shadow, falling on the white upturned face of their victim, that first gave them warning. The Jew was on his feet in a flash, in time to recognise me, but not in time to ward off the drive from my right that went home on his jaw. He was, as I have said,

a diminutive, slightly built creature, with no weight of bone in him. Under the blow he spun over and over, and then lay still. The fat man was much less active in getting to his feet. If he had confined himself to the drawing of his revolver he might have got me. But he was rather badly startled, and, as he drew, was attempting also to get on his feet. This gave me time. But he was almost up. Fair on the tip of his chin I caught him, a well-planted effort though I say it myself, and as he collapsed like a huge emptied sack his shot rang out on the still night, as if it had been a tyre punctured. I don't know where it went, into the sky probably as his arms flew up.

Kneeling beside the stranger who had so curiously drawn me into his affairs, I strove to bring him round, for I did not think he had sustained any injury beyond the sudden and violent fall. His eyes opened, and he looked up at me. After a dazed sort of scrutiny I saw recognition creep into them, and he smiled. I did what I could for him; but it was clear that somehow he was more seriously injured than I had anticipated, for he was incapable of movement. By himself he would not have made much of a burden to carry into safety, but, securely handcuffed as he was to the fallen policeman, that was out of the question. Then, when I saw something bright coloured at the corner of the mouth I laid his breast bare, and soon

discovered where the fat man's bullet had found lodgment.

The bullet had penetrated his right side, in its course passing through a small square of American cloth that was fastened almost under the arm-pit. Carefully I removed this. I felt him struggle, as if to speak, when I threw the thing aside. He was in great distress, endeavouring to raise himself, and pointing to the piece of black leather cloth lying on the road. I picked it up and then saw that it was a thin, flat packet that probably contained something he valued. There was a hole through it. Rather at a loss I tried to satisfy him by putting it in his breast pocket; but this did not seem to content him either. I let him see me put it into my own pocket, and looked him full in the eyes to indicate that I took charge of it for him. He smiled and tried to speak. I bent my head close to his mouth.

"Over," he said.

Having little doubt that it was, indeed, all "over" with him, I could only nod my confirmation.

With a little sigh, as from extreme exhaustion, he closed his eyes, and I bent down once more to see if he yet breathed. While I listened so, almost on the surface of the street, there came to my ear the far away sound of feet running fast. He must have heard that sound, too, I think, for he pushed at me gently.

"Over," he whispered. "Over, over." It was curious how he insisted on that.

Without doubt it was the man with the pitted face bringing the reinforcements for which he had been sent. Slipping over to the mouth of an alley on the dark side of the street, I waited for their coming. How grotesquely that scattered group lay in the white moonlight: the dead policeman, his helmet, some distance from him, on its side; the gigantic fat man with his head towards me and his feet lying over the prostrate officer; Dewinski beyond them, like a doll on its back, the legs oddly and stiffly outspread.

The running men gave a shout when they saw the group, which was visible from a good distance on such a night, and the patter of feet quickened.

Soon I saw them, and knew that the sooner I was gone the better. The man who led was the fellow I had seen before. He rapped out an oath of satisfaction as he came up and stopped by the wounded man, the man who had shown the white face in the Café Rosenkrantz, but who had shown nothing of the white feather.

I turned into the dark alley and ran for my life.

CHAPTER II

THE next morning I decided to absent myself from Professor Vorberg's lecture on the Origin of Racial Temperaments. My feet had suffered severely on the cobbles of side streets, and I imagined that a quiet morning in slippers would be a not unpleasant change. Besides, I was in no proper mood to listen with patience to the Professor's exhaustive theories on his pet subject: I had too much to think about in connection with the wild events of the preceding night, and had not as yet arrived at any theory which would account for them. After breakfast, however, I began to collect the necessary materials. In the *Berliner Tageblatt* a smudgy stop press item for which I was seeking caught my eye:

"MYSTERIOUS AFFAIR IN THE KEPPELSTRASSE.

"A mysterious affair is reported from the Keppelstrasse, the full details of which are not yet available for publication. At an early hour this morning Carl Brunner, a baker on his way

to work, came upon the bodies of a police officer and a young man lying together in the street. It is supposed that the officer had arrested the man and was engaged in conveying his charge to the station when he was set upon and shot by the prisoner's confederates.

"The scene of the attack was well chosen, for the Keppelstrasse is in a quarter with few inhabitants, being chiefly a street of warehouses.

"It is not yet known how the prisoner, whose body when discovered was still shackled to the officer, met his death, but it is expected that the full details will be furnished in the course of the day."

I relit my pipe. That would be what the ordinary newspaper man would make of the affair. No need to scoff at him. The chances were a hundred to one that it was an attempt at a rescue. Yet I wondered what the authorities would make of it when the doctors told them that the bullet was not in the officer but in his prisoner. The Jew and his companion, the fat man, had been got away, with the assistance I had seen arriving, and which, it pleased me to think, they would need.

But what lay behind it all? Like every other reader of newspapers I knew, of course, that crime had come to share in the modern passion for organisation and amalgamation. Burglary as a one man business was, like grocery as

a one man business, obsolete. Indeed, of the two, crime alone had attained to ramifications that were international. Undoubtedly some form of crime lay behind the events of last night—they all bore the atmosphere of it—but a merely natural and human curiosity demanded to know what the specific crime in this case was. Speculation is often a fascinating mental exercise, but when carried on without data is usually barren in concrete results.

It is, perhaps, strange that among the various theories I formulated to account for the few facts in my possession the view that this crime might have political motives behind it did not then enter my mind. The one great motive for murder that at once enters the British mind is robbery. That is because of the intense veneration the British mind has for property; as a race we are indisposed to admit that there is any other adequate motive; it must be the desire to acquire property of *some* kind. I admit that De Quincey, with his famous *Murder as a Fine Art* essay, may be quoted against me. But that essay I am convinced was written by the Opium Eater, and not by the Englishman, in De Quincey. It is not, therefore, really strange that I did not suspect this crime to have a political origin. In England politics have been for so long a mere game that we cannot conceive of a rational mind that would risk its supporting neck on behalf of any politician. Indeed, that is putting the situation in

an exaggerated form, for, outside Ireland, the exceptional country here as everywhere, we take our games much more seriously than our politics.

Whatever the impelling cause, it was a very ugly business, and I was well out of it with only the loss of a pair of boots that were practically new. It is true I was not yet quite out of the affair. There was that American cloth packet with which the dead man had entrusted me. If he was dead—and on that I must satisfy myself—the right thing would be to hand it over to the police. Unopened? That was the point towards which my thoughts converged. The man to whom it belonged might be a criminal, a traitor; and the men responsible for his death might be but the instruments of that vengeance which Bacon calls a rude kind of justice. Even so, the man had trusted me. I had liked him too. That attack of his on the policeman, in its execution so like a schoolgirl, in its spirit gallant enough for a paladin, a thing for both laughter and tears, it was that that fixed my sympathies.

On the whole I decided that I could open and examine the contents. In a way I was the man's trustee. My future course of action must be decided by what it contained.

I was looking for my scissors to slit the silk threads with which the packet was sewn, when the door opened gently and the voice of Trudchen, the maid, startled me:

"Herr Wohlenhaupt."

Looking round hastily I saw advancing a short man, spare of figure, whose blunt heavy features and large jowl made the head seem disproportionate to the body.

Without suggesting actual deformity, Herr Wohlenhaupt seemed to have been furnished with the head of a much bigger man. Though one might have to wait to see what effect such an arrangement had on his temper, there was no delay in recognising the effect it had on his circulation, his unhealthy pallor suggesting that the small heart, under the neat frock coat, could not supply colour to that vast expanse of countenance.

He bowed to me with some urbanity of manner, holding his hat to his small chest.

"Herr Abercromby?" he queried pleasantly.

And on my assenting he took possession of a chair, with another bow, as if to tell me that I, too, might be seated.

"A very fine morning, sir," he remarked, crossing his legs.

"Very pleasant," I answered.

"You have a nice outlook on the square; the trees, so fresh, and the flower beds make beautiful circles of colour."

At that I thought I could place him: a book canvasser! I had suffered thus before; they were irritating when they fondly imagined they were ingratiating.

"Sir," I answered, "it is an unusually early hour for callers, and as I do not suppose you merely called to chat on flowers and foliage I should be glad to know the purpose of your visit."

He scrutinised me in silence for a moment and then nodded.

"*Ach*, I understand," he said. "We Germans are too full of words; it is a national weakness. I myself have often said it. The English say, 'deeds not words,' and they are silent. Yes, the English silence is over half the world, while the Germans are talking together, in Germany."

Not quite understanding him, I said nothing to this, but waited. He recrossed his little legs.

"Well," he went on, "I will rise to the scratch at once, as you say in England. It is from my friend Otto Henschel I am come."

"Otto Henschel," I said, perplexed, for I knew no one of that name.

"Yes; the young man who gave you the papers last night."

"Papers!" I murmured, my perplexity deeper than before.

The shadow of a frown passed over Herr Wohlenhaupt's face. He must have thought I was acting a part.

"Sir," he said, "surely you will not deny that you received papers from my young friend, in the Keppelstrasse, last night?"

At the mention of the Keppelstrasse I understood. Involuntarily my hand went to my breast

pocket in which the packet lay. Herr Wohlenhaupt after his indignant question was watching me, and seeing the action nodded, with some appearance of relief, as I observed.

"Pardon me," I said, pulling out the packet, "your question misled me: you mentioned the contents. I had, of course, no knowledge of what was in this packet."

"You have not looked inside!" he cried, amazed.

"It seems to surprise you," I replied drily. "But I have not."

Herr Wohlenhaupt eyed me keenly, and I returned his scrutiny. Then he gave a curious rumbling chuckle, and held out his hand to take possession of the packet. It was lying on my knee, and I had thrust my little finger idly through the hole made by the bullet. The man had risen to his feet, and his hand trembled with eagerness, at least I fancied so. My own hand I laid firmly over the packet. Some instinct prompted me to do this. But it may only have been because I was nettled at being suspected of prying curiosity.

"One moment, sir," I said. "How am I to be sure that in handing this over to you I am fulfilling the obligation I took upon myself?"

"You suspect me——?" he began with some heat.

I held up my hand, protesting.

"There need be no talk of suspicion," I went

on; "it is enough that I don't *know*. But, as you have mentioned it yourself"—I pointed to the *Berliner Tageblatt* lying on the floor—"there is a paragraph in the paper which tells me the man is dead. What am I to make of that?"

He pursed up his lips in contempt, and kicked at the paper.

"Poof, the newspapers, they are always wrong. It is not an hour since I left Otto in his bed in the hospital. I will prove it to you."

He thrust his hand into his breast and extracted a folded note which he handed me with a bow. Unfolding and reading it, I discovered it to be a request that I should give the packet entrusted to my care in such odd circumstances last night to Herr Wohlenhaupt, and receive the grateful thanks of Otto Henschel.

It looked all quite regular, and there seemed to be nothing left for me to do but to discharge myself of the trust, and have done with the whole business. So I was thinking when the messenger's voice broke in with some impatience:

"And now, sir, that you have read for yourself my poor friend's wishes, it only remains for you to hand over his property, so that I may rid you of my presence and no longer interrupt your leisure."

I smiled at the sarcasm with which he concluded—on account of my slippered feet I suppose—and said:

"The funny thing is that I *don't* know that

this is Otto Henschel's writing. Indeed, I don't know that his name is Otto Henschel, if you come to that."

At this he drew himself up to his full height and folded his arms with a fine air of cold dignity. I suppose he saw I was hesitating.

"Sir, I, August Eitel Wohlenhaupt, answer for it that that is the handwriting of my friend."

"Quite so, quite so," I answered; and if I have to own the truth I must own that I was a little shaken. Then the illogicality of his position struck me, and I laughed. "But who is to answer for Herr August Eitel Wohlenhaupt?"

He fairly lost his temper at that. An angry flush overspread his massive face for a moment, and then, receding, left him more deadly pale than before.

"*Ach!*" he cried. "The exasperating English! You laugh pleasantly and hold on to the man's property while he is dying. When he is dead you will consider his property your own! Your whole Empire is made up of the goods of dead peoples—who had your assistance in dying."

The ferocious hatred in his voice and eyes startled me. It was like a sudden glimpse into a furnace. Yet it made things easier for me.

"At any rate," I answered drily, "if your friend is dying I have the best reasons for believing that he is dying from German and not from English bullets."

That took the wind out of his sails. He nodded his big head, looking down on the floor. The anger had gone, as suddenly as it had come. But I had seen.

"Pardon me, Herr Abercromby, I was overwrought by thinking of my poor Otto, eagerly and, as I thought, vainly awaiting my return. You speak the truth there, and I did forget it. You were good to him, yes. You stood by him when there was no one else to help him! *Ach*, sir, if I could tell you all his story! But I cannot, for it is his story and not mine!"

There were veritable tears in his eyes, but he smiled in kindly fashion through them, as he again extended his hand to take possession of his friend's packet. And, but for that momentary flash of burning hate into which he had been betrayed, I would have given it him. Even then I was doubtful: his hate had been for me or my race, not for this Otto Henschel. I knew enough to be aware how common that feeling was. It was merely his patriotism, and for it, as such, I could make allowances. And yet——!

"See here," I said suddenly, "I'll tell you what I'll do. If you like I'll accompany you to the hospital, and hand the thing over to the man from whom I received it, in your presence. There's the solution to our problem!"

Herr Wohlenhaupt stroked his chin. I thought he was fairly up against it then. But not a bit of it!

"Sir," he said calmly, "that solution has been somewhat long in coming to you. Had it been a possible one, believe me, I would myself have assisted your mental processes by suggesting it."

"Why isn't it possible?"

"Because the police are in this affair. You would be arrested the minute you asked for Otto at the hospital."

"Well," I answered, "I have nothing to fear from the police."

"Perhaps not," said Wohlenhaupt. "I was not thinking of you, but of Otto."

"How about yourself?" I asked.

"Me?" he returned. "I am a relation of his: it is natural I should visit him."

"A relation!" I said, surprised. "You had not mentioned the fact."

He gazed at me in blank astonishment.

"But, sir, why should I be here at all otherwise?"

It was all perfectly neat and pat! There was always something that balked me! It might be perfectly true and natural, but somehow the feeling rose in me that it was too natural and neat to be nature: it is art, and not nature, that provides for all contingencies. He had me cornered at every step. Then, as I pondered, a question came to me. I shot it at him, thinking to get him in a corner:

"By the way," I said, "who gave you my name and address?"

And, by Jove, I had him cornered! It is curious that, having provided so complete and circumstantial a story in other respects, the first obvious fact that required to be accounted for had been overlooked. It is true that up to that moment I had myself overlooked it—still, I had not had his time for thoughtful preparation.

There was, however, no trace of embarrassment in the face that regarded me, and the mask was simply dropped when he spoke. I told him what I thought of him, and what I proposed to do about the papers. He turned.

“What is your price?” he asked calmly.

“Price!” I gasped.

“Ah!” he nodded. “Neither to be persuaded nor bought—an honest obstinate fool, an Englishman.”

It was impossible not to laugh at this. He pointed a finger at me.

“Herr Abercromby,” he said gravely, “you have told me that if you read in the papers to-night of that man’s death you will open that packet, and choose your course by what you find there. Well, you will read in the papers to-night that the man is dead—for it is essential that he should die. I trust, sir, you will read the announcement with a fitting solemnity, for you will then be reading your own death warrant, unless——”

“Neither to be persuaded nor bought, nor threatened,” I interrupted him.

He looked down at me in pity.

"Threatened!" he said. "Young man, when I said you will die to-night if you open that thing I was not threatening you, but making a prediction and doing you a kindness, for, let me tell you, there are those behind this affair to whom it is far less trouble to do than to threaten to do."

At that I got on my feet to close the interview.

"Herr Wohlenhaupt, the rôle of turgid tragedian suits you better than that of bereaved relation. You are better with the bludgeon than with the rapier. But you may go back to those who sent you and say you've done your best. Now, if you will excuse me—I am going to be rather busy."

He had taken a card from his waistcoat pocket. I felt rather sorry for him.

"You did very well, you know," I said. "You very nearly had it!"

"I'll forgive the sneer, sir——" he said, laying the card on the table.

"It was really an admission," I interjected.

"If by three o'clock you are wise enough to change your mind, and leave the papers at this address."

When he had gone I picked up the card; it was inscribed, "Joseph, Café Rosenkrantz."

Of course it never entered my head to return the papers in the manner suggested. Apart from

all questions as to my obligations towards the real owner, it was intolerable to me to be, so to speak, placed at the disposal of a set of foreigners who chose to play at the dagger and dark lantern style of tragedy. I watched Herr Wohlenhaupt pick his way across the Square, and before he had disappeared round the corner I had my mind made up: the hospital to which the man had been taken must be found; I must know definitely whether he was alive or dead. If alive I would find means of returning his packet; if dead I would probably send it by post to the police. Then I should be rid of an exceedingly unpleasant business.

At this time my theory was that the papers in the packet were either the proceeds of some *coup* by the gang of unscrupulous international thieves, of whose operations there had been no little talk in the press lately, or some blackmailing materials that would bowl over some rich man, and which would be as good as a regular income to the possessor. Something sinister or valuable, or perhaps both, it must contain, since blood was so freely shed on its account.

There was little difficulty in finding the Keppelstrasse. I met a good many idlers walking about in it, drawn by the report of the affair. But I could get no information as to which hospital the men had been removed. All sorts of contradictory stories could be heard from the self-important individuals who, surrounded by little

knots of people, professed to have full knowledge of the affair. They were wrong even as to the spot at which the affray took place; and seeing this I gave up hope of obtaining any real information.

Contenting myself with getting the name of the nearest hospital, I set off expecting to find my man there. But I failed to find him there, or at the three others to which I went. Either they took me for a newspaper man, about whom, no doubt, they had their orders, or he had been taken much further off. Indeed, if as the *Tageblatt* reported the man was dead he would not be taken to the hospital at all, but to the police mortuary. This was very likely the real explanation. Still, I could not be certain. So as I was rather tired out by my search I made up my mind to betake myself to a café, and there await the first issue of the evening papers, which would surely give me some clue in the additional facts they would contain.

It was a hot afternoon. I took a seat that was under the outside awning, with just the plants in the big green tubs between myself and the street. The time of waiting seemed long. At last the sound I had been listening for reached me. Away at the far end of the street I could hear the shouting newsboy. Presently he came up the step and approached each table in turn. I waited till he came to me. At the top of the front column was this:


"THE AFFAIR IN THE KEPPELSTRASSE.

"The man found in the Keppelstrasse handcuffed to a police official died in the hospital after admission without recovering consciousness. He has not yet been identified. The condition of the officer is unchanged. We understand that the police are in possession of several strong clues, and developments of a startling nature are imminent."

For the moment I did not quite see what to make of the paragraph. There was a want of harmony between this and the earlier report. "The condition of the officer is unchanged." So it would be, if the man's condition was as the first report had it. What did they expect? It made me rather angry. Wohlenhaupt had been right about it. He had lied, though, in saying he had been sent by him. But of course I knew that already. So the little fellow was dead! It is curious how the feeling of his packet against my breast gave me a sympathy for him, almost a sense of fellowship or partnership at that moment. He must have loved life like other men. Certainly he had fought pluckily to keep a hold on it, and met death like a man when he saw it inevitable. At the church across the way the clock was striking the hour. The three strokes sounded sonorously, as if they were a passing bell. Then I recalled the fantastic Wohlenhaupt, that cross between our own Guy Faux and the

Corsican Brothers. From him I had no fear. The sight, however, of a policeman sauntering along, with an apparently casual glance at me, was a reminder that I myself might be one of the clues mentioned. It might be as well to make for my rooms, and resume my search for the scissors which Herr Wohlenhaupt had interrupted.

With this purpose in view I threw the newspaper aside and stepped down into the street.



CHAPTER III

IT was, as I have said, my purpose to go to my rooms, in the seclusion of which I could examine the contents of the black packet. The distance was not more than a mile, and being now more than sufficiently rested by my easy afternoon in a cane chair, amid the orange-plants, I proposed a saunter homewards through the pleasant streets. It took some time for me to realise how much lay between me and that lodging in the quiet square. It must be confessed that I was rather slow in appreciating the true significance of certain happenings that were now to come thick and fast upon me.

The fact is I was nearer death than I had ever been, before I had taken fifteen steps from that café's veranda. Leisurely crossing the street, I heard a sudden, startled shout from several voices. I did not know to whom they shouted, nor indeed if to any one; and I did not stay to look. I couldn't tell you why I didn't; I only know that I sprang desperately for the pavement. It was some deep down animal instinct that dictated that mad leap. Something like that auto-

matic flash that closes the eyelid, far ahead of any message from the brain, near as that is to the threatened eye. As I lay on the pavement, I saw a woman near me leaning against the park railings, covering her face with her hands. Several people came running up to assist me.

"What was it?" I gasped.

"That car. There it is!" a man cried. "Ah, it is out of sight already; it never stopped!"

And they all vociferously denounced the iniquity of motorists. They were all very kind. Indeed, one old gentleman, whose white side whiskers reminded me of a celebrated diplomatist, knelt on the ground to dust my knees with his own handkerchief, while his friend, a tall young fellow in spectacles, supported me with his arm. I was astonished to find that the experience could so unnerve me. Still, that sudden swoop of Death has to be experienced to be understood. I had looked past the people around me, had seen the track of the wheels suddenly converge towards the pavement and knew what that meant. I gazed in horrid fascination at the faint marks of those wheels on the hard wooden street, and they made a deeper impression on my mind than they did on the road. A sensation almost like nausea took hold of me.

I was recalled to myself by feeling the soft touch of fingers in the region of my heart. The kindly old gentleman had finished with my knees, and was, I suppose, feeling me over to ascertain

possible bruises. His fingers were resting lightly on the packet when I released myself. That touch was electrical! It may be that he was the medical man he claimed to be; but I assured him that I had really no need of further services, and declined the offer he made to accompany me home in a cab. And as at this juncture a policeman came up to disperse the loitering people, we bowed to each other and, after my thanks, we separated. I trust I do him no injustice. He may have been a doctor. On the other hand he and his friend may have been just a pair of—well, members of the floating criminal fraternity of Berlin, to whom no opportunity comes amiss. To-day I know that in this last thought I did less than justice to the common Berlin thief; and yet he may have been a member of my own profession.

The incident had taken place in the Potsdamerplatz. By the time I had turned into the narrow Friedrichstrasse I had dismissed it from my mind. The afternoon was wearing on, and most of the people had finished their shopping or their promenade, and were making for home, the omnibuses crowded, taxis busy, so that the policeman on point duty opposite the Café Kranzler had his hands full. Standing to light a cigarette under the ornamental clock tower that fronts the Hôtel Bauer, I watched the traffic before crossing the street; I had had my lesson. Quite by chance I observed a lady, who had come out of the Kodak

shop at the corner, signal to an approaching taxi. The man missed seeing her somehow, and sailed up to the island on which I stood.

"Taxi, sir?" he called to me, leaning forward over the control.


Now you can understand, if you have ever yourself barely escaped with your life from under fat rubber wheels, that for an hour or so afterwards they are repellent. Besides, though he may have missed the waving umbrella he could scarcely have been deaf to the high-pitched vocal remonstrance. She was following up too! Something made me delay to answer the man's question. I wanted to see if he was after any fare or some special and particular fare. He had descended and thrown open the door before I had relit my cigarette. But when the indignant and breathless lady arrived he barred her entrance.

"This gentleman!" he said calmly.

But when she turned her volubility on me I quickly assured her it was unthinkable that I should deprive her, however urgently I needed the cab. So I saw her in, and raised my hat as she rolled away. I resumed my walk a little thoughtful. The explanation, of course, was that all taxi drivers prefer male passengers on account of a real, or supposed, greater generosity with tips. Still—— I wondered. Three incidents had happened to me since three o'clock. Any of them

such as might have happened to any one. But three inside an hour! I thought of Wohlenhaupt with more respect, for there began to creep into my mind the suspicion that these incidents did not come by chance but by the choice of some governing and directing will. If it were so I would soon have further experiences, things that would seem to happen to me by chance, but which, in reality, were carefully planned and thought out with all the love of detail and thoroughness which is so large a part of Teutonic methods.

My rooms began to seem much farther off. I had a queer thrill of expectation, wondering what would happen next, but keeping very alert as I threaded my way along the narrow pavement of the Friedrichstrasse. I knew better than to take the usual and direct way home, feeling certain that if I was indeed surrounded by unseen and methodical enemies a good many traps would already be set along the route. So I did not hurry, knowing that I was fairly safe from anything but apparent accidents so long as I kept to the more crowded thoroughfares. I kept on the move, with a roving eye for the various small interests of the streets. I tried to see if I had that sense of being watched, of which one sometimes hears in works of fiction, and came to the conclusion that it is a feeling one can engender in oneself, by simply suspecting the presence of watchers behind one.



Sometimes in my leisurely promenade I would stop at a corner of some shop window and cast a casual glance around. But not once did my eye light on any of the pedestrians who seemed to be dogging me. I tried, too, to memorise the people, and from time to time would scan them to see if I could identify one I had already seen; but I never did. If I was being watched it was by people who gave no sign.

Finally I bethought me of a dodge that might draw them. There is an American bar just where the railway spans the street, and this bar, I knew, had two exits, a main one in the Friedrichstrasse and another farther down in the side street that faces the railway culvert. Suppose I went in. They would certainly expect me to leave by the other door if they suspected I knew of their surveillance—if indeed it was not all fancy, of which I was by no means sure. It was an hour at which the place was sure to be deserted. Well, I entered, and standing at the counter “named my poison,” of the approved American mixture. Save for two very swell negroes, lolling in graceful attitudes at the far end of the bar, I had the place to myself. “Now,” I said to myself as I sipped the cool iced drink gratefully, “we’ll see if I am watched”; for I knew that they would not dare to let me out of their sight. So I waited for the door to open. It was a thrilling moment!

I don’t know *what* I expected. Certainly not

the figure that did actually shove the door open, a little wretched creature of a flower-seller, with a dozen or so of buttonhole roses arranged on a little tray supported by a strap round his neck. He threw a hasty glance around, and when he saw the flamboyant coloured gentlemen made straight for them, passing me without a second look. Evidently he knew where his chances lay. I watched the trafficking with amusement. So also did two other men who then came in. The negro gentlemen did not appear to be well posted in the language, and the negotiations were conducted chiefly by gesture. The new-comers, though thirsty, were prepared to be affable, and quickly detected the source of my amusement at the other end of the bar. Presently, after much gesticulation and raising of eyebrows, the bejewelled coloured gentlemen had added buttonholes to the rest of their adornments, and the flower-seller approached us, beaming at his own success.

His joy, however, was destined to be short-lived. One of the late arrivals, who had turned to speak to the bar tender—that I believe is the correct designation—did not observe the hawker's approach, and in extending his foot negligently tripped the man up, just as he came to me, so that he fell, and his flowers were scattered on the floor. When I helped him to his feet he was extraordinarily enraged, and the other replying hotly, and at the same time trampling on the

fallen blooms, we soon had the prospect of a nasty row. The flower-seller appealed to me, and the man who had caused the accident appealed to his friend. I was taken aback by the promptness of the storm.

But not so much so as to miss its possible significance. It was all so very neat. Fairly confident that I had got the information I sought by my entry into the place I did not stay to intervene in the squabble, as no doubt I was expected to do, if they were the people for whom I took them.

I walked as far as the Brandenburger Tor. The sense of being shadowed strengthened in me, and I didn't like it. Only once before had I experienced that feeling, and I recalled it then. After an exceptionally hard session in the medical school I had taken a holiday at a village set in one of the valleys among the Grampians. One day night overtook me on the way back after a long walk on the high moors. The road ran in the bottom of the valley and the woods were so close that the branches of the pines met overhead. There was a mile of it like that—so dark that I could not see the road at my feet. It was as silent as the grave too; but by and by, in the silence, I began to hear strange soft voices and whisperings all around me. My reason kept urging that there was nothing there, but something else in me, for which science has as yet no name, made reason abdicate for the time being,

and, taking over muscular control, forced me to run till I was out of that eerie place.

It was odd that the half-forgotten experience should come back to me in the Pariserplatz. Was the sense of being a hunted man developing in me? Certainly I was rather fatigued, but it wasn't that. Physical fatigue is a healthy and wholesome thing; and this fatigue was a faintly nauseating sensation, a *malaise* of the mind and soul. My gorge rose against Germans. Hitherto while my sympathies were French I had never, on that account, felt any need of antipathy for Germans. A sort of cold rage gripped me. I turned on my heel and, looking neither to right nor left any more, made off straight for my rooms.

The long summer evening was wearing itself out when I reached my own doorstep. Over the gardens the houses on the far side of the square stood dark, their roofs silhouetted sharply against the last glow of the calm evening sky. From somewhere within the enclosure a thrush made the quiet square resound with his liquid, flute-like notes. No one was in sight. Whatever gentry were on my heels had had a pretty sharp walk. I slipped my latch-key home and entered. Here, at any rate, was a haven in which I could be at peace awhile.

I determined to go early to bed, for it had been altogether an exhausting day. But first I would satisfy myself as to the contents of the

papers in my possession: there could be no sleep until after that had been done. In the morning I might perhaps find it well to go over the town to consult with Peter Dunn, the one man, a post-graduate student like myself, in whom I could place reliance in any rough and tumble business. If I had been wise I would have gone to Peter's instead of coming home, but I was tired; and the thought of the restfulness of my rooms drew me to them; and, besides, I did not *yet* realise the danger in which I stood. Accordingly, it seemed to me that I could handle the affair, such as it was, myself, and have a good story that would make Peter lift his eyebrows, when I told him of it afterwards.

So, after Trudchen had brought me hot water and I had had a wash, I entered my sitting-room, determined that this time no one should balk me of my inspection of the mysterious papers. To this end I had told the girl not to admit any one, and when she said that Frau Loeb had gone to visit a sick relation and might be away till very late, if she did return that night, and that as she herself was proposing to retire, having had a busy day with the mistress of the house absent, no one could be admitted unless I myself descended to admit them, I was satisfied on that point, and readily gave her the permission to retire, for which she asked in her heavy, sullen way.

No sooner had I snapped on the light than I saw that there was something funny about my

room. I stared round awhile without at first grasping what it was. The place had somehow an unfamiliar look. What was it? Then suddenly I saw. It was all so scrupulously neat, so perfectly arranged. No stray papers littered the floor, and my books were all in their places. Even my MS. notes of lectures were on my desk, kept in place by the paper-weight, which was indeed heavy enough to be proof against a gale of wind, much less a draught from open windows, being a thing of red Aberdeen granite, a replica in miniature of the memorial erected to a deceased professor of theology, a solid, square heathenish sarcophagus from Egypt or Babylon.

My amusement, however, was shortlived when I found that, as is usual in rooms arranged by deft feminine fingers, I could not find what I searched for—the scissors to cut the finely drawn threads of my packet. Finally, I concluded that the girl must have taken them for her own use, and fearing she might be gone to bed if I hunted longer I rang rather sharply, being in the usual state of heat that such a well-arranged room arouses in most men.

She seemed a long time in answering. I waited awhile and rang again. Down below I could hear the bell jangling, and then gradually die into silence. There was still no response. Then I went out to the top of the stairs and called down, peering over the banisters. The

girl certainly could not yet have gone to bed, for even if I had missed hearing her mount to her attic she had not had time. Yet down the dark well of the staircase I could see no chink of light anywhere. I called more loudly, and my voice raised echoes that were like many voices answering me. In the sudden, dead stillness that followed, I began to feel that eeriness that comes over one who is alone in a house when dusk has fallen. I went back to my lighted room, my irritation gone. The girl must have gone out on some domestic errand she had forgotten, perhaps to remind some forgetful tradesman. And yet it could not be that, for all the shops must have been closed for some time.

As I stood irresolute, the precision of my room again caught my eye. Perhaps it had been searched! Not, of course, in the hope of discovering the papers—they were not such fools as to have that hope—but for some useful purpose. They are such a thorough race! No small fact that related to my tastes, habits or character would be overlooked. The precise manner in which everything had been replaced would be itself a concealment. Still, though I dismissed this from my thoughts as far-fetched, I began to be uneasy in my mind. Trudchen had never been a person to be called amiable or engaging; but it seemed to me now that she had been more sullen and *farouche* than was her wont. And what did this absence portend? I became restless. Where

now was the sense of security I had promised myself in returning to my rooms? What a fool I had been to come! I ought to have gone to Peter Dunn's when I had the chance. Then I shouldn't have been left alone in the house, trapped in it, with the long night rapidly advancing. Was it really too late to go?

I am ashamed to say it, but I tiptoed out on to the landing again, and again peered down into the black and cavernous well of the staircase, listening intently. Dearly would I have liked to ring again; but I could not, I couldn't endure the sudden, strident clang of that bell bursting upon this silence. And perhaps there was no Trudchen to answer. Perhaps I had done the dull, honest girl an injustice in thinking her an accomplice of these men. She herself might be a victim; and I pictured her lying extended on the kitchen floor suddenly strangled, her face blackening, the tongue protruding horribly, and that bell in violent and ineffectual motion overhead.

The intense stillness and darkness took me by the throat. There were certainly men waiting for me down there! I remembered, and now understood, that prayer of Ajax when the attack came on Troy, that he might have light to see his enemies' face. Certainly I swore at myself for a fool—and still listened as I did so. I must get out of this house. Now I was sure I had been followed. No doubt remained. The place was a trap. I would go over to Dunn's. Peter

was a man of mind as well as muscle. It would be quite easy yet. But the chief thing was to get away, anywhere, out of this house.

But the thought of a step by step descent of that staircase made me shudder. It was all so portentously still and quiet, and I would have thought that time itself stood still but for the loud knocking of my heart. And then, as I made a step forward, there seemed to break into the immense silence the murmur of voices whispering together down there. It was that accursed wood over again, only this time they were real! And as I leaned far over the banisters to catch at confirmation my ear seemed to find it, as some voice struck a chance sibilant in a word that carried farther than the deep gutturals. Then somewhere below the stairs creaked.

I drew back as if I had been shot and, lifting my clenched fists in the darkness, cursed myself for a blind fool. I had been impervious to warnings. Incidents, full of significance, had come to me, and had fallen, like the good seed, on stony ground, had bounced off my understanding like hail off a slate roof. I had indeed put up a poor fight. Fight! there had been no fight! They had simply followed me about, and now they were going to take the papers. Incidentally they would also take my life; but that merely on account of the trouble to which I had put them, and not because it was anything to which they attached value or significance.

I stood back against the wall and waited. A sentimental sadness came over me. It was such a futile thing to end one's life so, incontinently, on a lodging-house staircase. True, I might hide myself in some corner, or cupboard, in the upper regions of the house; but I should inevitably be discovered in the ignominious shelter, and only die five or ten minutes older, my person covered with cobwebs and dust. It behooves a man to die always with fortitude, and, if possible, with dignity. Thus the coward and the sentimentalist in me.

The fact is I was pretty far through. There may be men who could pass through my recent experiences and apprehensions and show neither physical nor nervous exhaustion. A wonderful and unnatural breed! In my experience bravery is almost always connected with fear; and perhaps the bravest deeds in the history of man have been done in a reaction from fear. The brave man is not the man who never fears, for there is no such man: he is the man who reacts against fear. And the difference between a brave man and a coward is simply this, that the one does, and the other does not react.

The first step on the road back to sanity was made when it occurred to me that, even if I myself must be taken by these cruel and bloody men, I could prevent them from taking that which they valued most, the "Henschel" papers. With the notion of getting rid of the papers I stole back to

my room. There was no fire of course, which fact saved me from my first foolish thought—foolish because, for all I knew, to destroy the papers might be all they themselves desired. So I turned to the window, thinking to throw the packet far. It was thin and firm in its American leather case, and would skim like a slate, perhaps even into the gardens, where it might chance to be found by an honest person.

But even as I got ready for the throw, a better course of action came into my mind. It is a fact that ever since I *knew* they were there, preparing to steal on me unawares, that is to say, ever since the danger had not in it anything of that dread of the unknown which is probably man's inheritance from the stone age, when his ancestors lived in a mysterious and strangely peopled world, I had been getting back to myself. Once I saw that the danger was what men call "real" I ceased to fear it. My wits became active. There would be a fight for it yet!

Kicking off my shoes, I went and removed the three bulbs from the electric pendant which illuminated the room. Then I picked up the heavy granite paper-weight and slipped behind my half-open door, listening.

It was quite dark. The street lamp below cast a faint radiance on the white plaster ceiling that intensified the blackness of the room. The only visible thing in it was a white plaster bust of the Emperor that stood on the top of a flimsy

kind of fretwork cabinet. In the dim light reflected from the ceiling the bust, with upturned moustache and baleful eye, rose ghost-like above the blackness of the room.

Then, distinctly, I heard the stairs creak twice. I had not left myself much time. Presently there was a soft shuffle of feet on the landing, and then a pause outside the half-open door. They were perhaps at first puzzled at the darkness and silence. Perhaps they thought I had fallen asleep in my chair. Then some one entered the room. It was so still that I could hear his finger-tips passing over the wall-paper and woodwork, searching for the switch, and there was a sudden, metallic click as it was found and pressed down. But the room did not leap into light! After the briefest interval I heard the second switch go down; but with the bulbs removed there was again no result. I *felt* that men had come into the room, and knew that I had but to extend a hand to touch them. In that tense moment their breathing was audible, and I feared they must hear the beating of my heart.

I imagine they stood awhile, intent, every sense strained to discover in what part of the room I was. If only I could get them separated! Then I heard a sound that told me some one had gone down on hands and knees, and was beginning to creep stealthily over the floor. I was convinced they knew the exact position of every article of furniture, and had in their mind's eye the whole

contents of the room. Anyhow, the man on the floor avoided collision with the things, and made no noise that would have awakened the lightest sleeper. He was making progress too! I heard the soft sweep of his hands on the floor close to the corner in which I stood, and knew that the moment for action was upon me.

I gripped my paper-weight tight—that memorial to the eminent theologian—and hurled it into the far and opposite corner of the room. It made a perfectly infernal racket as it struck that flimsy fretwork erection, for, as I have said, it was fashioned out of solid Aberdeen granite. I fancy it brought the whole erection down; it certainly laid Kaiser Wilhelm low, for I saw that his white ghostly face had disappeared.

They jumped to the conclusion that I had been trying to conceal myself behind the cabinet. There was a rush of feet across the room. I think some of them fell over the man on the floor. There were deep guttural German oaths. Two shots rang out. They had got separated, and were as likely to kill each other as to kill me.

In the midst of the hubbub I was round the door and down the stairs in a flash. The back door was ajar. This door led out on to a narrow, cobbled alley that emerged on a traversing side street at each end. I did not at once rush into this alley, but prospected it first from the shelter of the door. And it was as well I did so. There was some one standing in the shadow of the

opposite wall. As far as I could make out he was watching the upper windows. The shots and the shouting had probably drawn his attention. No doubt he thought there was good reason for supposing the guard was no longer necessary. Anyhow he came towards the door, and as he passed almost touched me where I stood, in the dark, against the wall. Had I been a minute later we would have met on the stairs. I slipped out, and ran for the exit to the street lower down, the rough cobbles hurting my feet cruelly.

Once in the street I had to go back to a walking pace, so as not to attract attention from any stray policeman. In spite of this I made good progress, and, being familiar with that neighbourhood, was able to steer a straight course to the point at which I would find a taxi.

Having changed when I came home I had no money in my pockets; but that troubled me little, for I would get Peter to pay the man when we arrived at his place. The only dubiety I had was as to whether the man would, in my shoeless and hatless state, let me enter his cab before I showed him my money. Besides, the suit I wore in the house was a very old one: I had been brought up to be careful of my clothes.

However, determining to make up in swagger what I lacked in appearance, I plodded on hopefully, for I was now in regions where I might pick up a cab at any minute. Presently I saw

the double lights swimming along. Taking up a position right under a street lamp and lighting a cigarette, I hailed the cab as it came on. Happily it was disengaged, and promptly swung in towards the kerb. I gave him Dunn's address, but no time for inspection!

It would be good to see Peter. What a lot I had to tell him, although I had seen him but three days ago. I would like to tell him of the undercut I had given the fat creature in the street last night, and we would sit up till, between us, we had settled on a plan for future action. Yes, it would be good to see Peter. He would do my nerves good. He would quieten me down; his big voice alone was a febrifuge for a tumultuous circulation.

In perhaps twenty minutes we swung up to the flats at which Dunn lodged, and I vaulted out, telling the driver to wait till I came down. I noticed that he stared at my light blue silk socks, and seemed somewhat perturbed. He said nothing, however: my assured manner settled that.

The assured manner had a brief existence! It went out of me like the wind out of a burst football when at the door of the flat I was informed that Peter had been called suddenly to London. This was as good an undercut as any I had come to boast about! To the woman I must have seemed the worse for drink, in my hatless and shoeless condition, and the fish-eyed

stare with which I received her information must have confirmed the impression. She made haste to shut the door in my face.

"One moment!" I cried desperately. "Will he be gone for long?"

The foot I thrust in to prevent her shutting the door received a bruise, and did not succeed in its object, my question being left unanswered. As if it made the slightest difference to me in my present plight whether he came back next day or next year! But I continued to stare at the closed door.

There was the cab too! Of course it was nothing when compared with my other dangers. One can bilk a cabman—a mean fraud, sometimes with a touch of comedy in it. Under necessity I could do it; those flats had always a back exit to a common yard, and once there I could readily scale the wall. But, after that, where was I to go? And I was now so full of respect for my pursuers that I reached the point of debating with myself whether it would not be better to let the chauffeur *catch* me attempting to bilk him, and get myself locked up, in safety for one night at least. This course I had to dismiss when I thought of the papers in my possession which, when I was searched at the station, would connect me, whatever their contents might be, with the Keppelstrasse affair. I must really dodge the man. So only could I obtain the obscurity I sought. Well, I could not stand there longer, or

the driver would soon be ringing bells in search of his fare. When, however, I had descended there was my man waiting for me, on a spot from which he could keep an eye on his car and on the back exit I meant to use. Perhaps he knew all about back exits! There was now nothing for it but to assume the confidence that had before been real.

"Drive me to the Café Rosenkrantz," I said.

Heaven knows why I named that place, perhaps the last place on earth in which I wished to find myself. Still, it did not matter. As I never intended to arrive there, one address was as good as another.

But by and by I had good reason to be sorry for my selection of that address.

The fellow was now deeply suspicious of me. How he contrived to read my intentions I cannot pretend to explain. I suppose he had a large experience. My innocent idea was to drop out when the car slowed down, either for traffic or in rounding a corner. But he travelled at such a speed, and the streets were so empty, that he never slowed down, so that, presently, I began to see myself being landed at the headquarters of those who sought me. Our pace was so great that at first I feared an accident, and then, as we got nearer and nearer to the Café I veered round and feared there would not be one! Sometimes in rounding corners he did slow down, as otherwise the cab simply couldn't have taken them,

except on two wheels. But every time that happened the fellow kept casting round a watchful eye on me. It was this over carefulness that was his undoing, however. I had a piece of string in my pocket, which I had saved from a parcel of books received earlier in the week. This I tied to the window strap opposite. Then I carefully opened the door, just enough to free the catch, and got back to my place by the other door, just behind the driver, retaining my hold on the string all the while. We were in a quiet road bordered with trees. I waited! When to get round a corner the cab had sufficiently slowed down to give me half a sporting chance of not breaking my neck, I pulled the string and shut the opposite door with a bang and a click. The driver instantly slewed round, and, not being able to see me as I crouched down at the door behind him, instantly slammed on his brakes. Opening my door I got out, while he was freeing himself to go for the other door. Indeed, I was over the pavement, had vaulted the low iron railings, and was among the shrubs of the gardens, almost before he had pulled up. As I lay there, I heard him go cursing and shouting away down the road. It did not amuse me.

Sitting on the earth among the bushes, I pondered moodily on my present desolate condition and dangerous future prospects.

CHAPTER IV

BEYOND Peter Dunn I had only the merest acquaintances in Berlin. Still there was a small number of fellow-countrymen, not to mention some young Americans whom I had run across, and in whom I trusted to find that the bond of a common country, or, at least, a common blood, counted for something. This was what I wondered about, wondered as I sat on the damp earth, my head on my knees, my hands holding the blue socks that were black enough now. Would the fine, fervid nationality, so often expressed at our festivities in national songs, wake up to the pitch of practical help?

This doubt on my part will, I know, move any Aberdeen Scotsman who has borrowed this book to an expenditure of generous indignation. Let me explain that every continental capital has its full complement of British subjects belonging to the scallywag class. They do not prey on the natives. Their victims are fellow-countrymen, and their lay is a plea for financial assistance, on the ground of common nationality; and a very powerful one it is, quite irresistible to a Scot.

I was familiar with the breed, having myself parted with sums it then distressed me to think of to men who had talked to me of the sunrise on the Pentlands, the blue-grey morning smoke of Edinburgh, or the way the water runs below the Teith Bridge at Callander; only to run across these homesick exiles a week or so later, still something short of the full fare back. I sighed as I thought of it. Could I not "venture to approach" others in such a way myself? I feared not, for the game could only be successful with the, as yet, inexperienced, and even with them, to inspire confidence, a certain decency and rationality of appearance were needed. A man must not, as I did then, bear every evidence of having just emerged from a prolonged carouse. Still, my spirits did not touch anything like despair. It was true that I had not the least notion in what part of the city I was, for the road, in the brief glance I had of it, was unfamiliar. But no difficulty in outward conditions is likely to raise despair in a man who has just barely escaped an incontinent and unwonted death.

So now that the cabman's hue and cry had long died away, and the man, as I charitably trusted, had reconciled himself to his loss, I got over the railings and set off in quest of charity.

I was cold and stiff. A thin fine rain had begun to fall. Indeed, it was almost more like mist than rain, for it made the street lamps blurred and dim, and left little beads of moisture

on my clothes. The night was very still; not a soul could I see, and, though from afar there came the gathered undertone of the scattered night traffic of a great city, the only sound in my road was that made when the misty rain, gathering on the leaves, fell with intermittent "plops" on the earth. Had I had shoes, the percussion of my feet on the road in walking would soon have restored my chilled blood to warmth; but this, too, was denied me, for in the shoeless and tender condition of my feet, my going was more of a furtive slink than a walk.

I judged myself to be somewhere in the neighbourhood of the Thiergarten, and not far from the Brandenburg Gate. It was my purpose, first, to find out exactly where I was, and then work my way by unfrequented streets and alleys to the district where most students reside. So I went on, taking my bearings as best I could, like some ship casting the lead in unknown seas.

By and by I saw I was approaching streets that were less destitute of wayfarers; and I had to agree with myself as to what character I had best assume, that of plain tramp or of debonair roysterer. My clothes were very nearly bad enough for an outcast, but my chin was not. On the other hand, the roysterer calls aloud for notice from every one, while the beggar has only attractions for the police. I decided for the less conspicuous part of an outcast of the streets; and, with the help of some of that green mouldy

coating that gathers on tree trunks, I made my face and hands look as if they had not been washed for a month, and were now reconciled to it.

At the first big street I had to cross, a disconcerting experience awaited me. Two men standing on the refuge in the centre ceased speaking suddenly on my approach. I wondered at first if I really was such a pitiable spectacle as to strike the men dumb. Had I overdone my make up? A common fault with your amateur. I wasn't across to the other pavement before they were up with me, and a piece of money was thrust into my hand.

"What is that?" I said stupidly. Imagine a real beggar saying "What is that?" when his fingers closed on money!

They were big stout fellows, and were scrutinising me narrowly out of their small, sharp, pig-like eyes. When I spoke the one gave a grunt, to which the other nodded.

"You are very kind."

I put a whine into it this time—but, alas, the very contrast to the staccato surprise of my first exclamation was in itself enough to raise suspicion! They were very far indeed from being kind, those two. Seeing the glance that passed between them, a glance which made me suspect that I should be much more forcibly examined when we got to any conveniently quiet corner, I thought it high time to shake them off. Who

were they—plain clothes officers looking for some criminal? It was very awkward. Perhaps it might even be in connection with the Keppelstrasse affair.

Whatever it was, it would never do to get myself arrested. I must make a bolt for it, and there must be no mistake about getting away. They began to walk one on each side of me, suspicious but as yet not sure. The moment they were their hands would be on me. I “sensed” that, as Americans say. Now your German is amazingly thorough, but he is not quick. Like all races, too, who do not play football he has a fixed idea that a person who attempts to escape must run *forward*. I remember the first occasion on which I perceived this curious fact. It was in Paris when an English touring fifteen were playing the Stade Française. The Frenchmen always tackled forward, and they were quick enough certainly; but anything like a side step, or a wheel back, left them grasping at nothing more solid than the air. It takes a long time to explain, but in reality I fancy I was not more than three minutes altogether with these two men. Knowing, then, that they were ready to grasp the moment I made a forward bound I did the unexpected thing, backed suddenly and wheeled off at full pace—for I was always quick off the mark—down the street. They were both, as I have said, bulky men, and they were taken aback too, and floundered against each other. It

looked an easy thing for me; but I had this to give wings to my heels—a cry from one to the other:

“The Englishman—Abercromby!”

And at that I knew from what it was I had escaped. I heard them lumbering on behind me. Had they been representatives of law and order in plain clothes I should have heard much whistling, and a mighty hubbub. As it was they followed in silence.

It was something of a day I had gone through. The usual placid tenor of a student's life was no sort of preparation for this kind of thing. There is, too, a limit set to what one's nervous system can sustain. True enough, death was no stranger to me. In hospitals I had often seen men die. But in hospitals men die quietly, in bed, with clean sheets, a due observance being paid by all concerned to the ritual of dying. It is quite another thing to meet Death stalking through the streets, and hitting out savagely and inconsequently at entirely healthy people who chance to cross his path. True I had never found much difficulty in getting away from the gang; but I seemed to be continually meeting them. And the nervous exhaustion that was stealing over me began to give me the hallucination that I was surrounded by enemies, in a sort of net that was being drawn closer and closer.

There was an immense danger for me in anything like a quiet street.

I took breath for a moment, leaning against a door.

I was no longer able to run.

The place in which I found myself was a big empty square. There were no garden or trees in the centre, and so around its four sides one saw the entire quadrangle of its lamps. The darkness of the unlighted centre gave an impression of vastness, and the few lights that yet shone in the windows opposite seemed remote and diminutive. As I leaned against the big door, wiping away the cold sweat of exhaustion from my face, I heard the footsteps of some one advancing from my side of the square. I could tell it was a woman, for she was humming to herself some snatch of music. A woman of some strength of character, too, to judge by the firm, determined tread, not to mention the fact that she was abroad at that hour, alone, and evidently unafraid.

I went to meet her. If only I had had a hat to raise in salutation! She did not, of course, hear me.

"Madam," I said. "Madam!"

She looked a little startled, apparently coming back from dreams, and stared at me. As she passed me I saw she was quite young. She was carrying a roll of music under her arm.

"Madam!" I cried, turning towards her, and holding out my hands.

She lifted her roll of music threateningly.

"Take care!" she cried, stamping her foot fiercely.

A perfect spitfire of a girl. She had a pale face, rather Slavonic in outline, and her eyes were large.

"I *am* taking care," I answered eagerly. "Madam, you see before you a man whose life is in danger. There are those close at hand who will kill me if they find me alone, for I can run no more. Let me at least walk beside you till we reach some more frequented place."

She stared at me in blank amazement. I held up my hand.

"Listen!" I said.

From the other side of the big empty square came the far-away sound of running feet.

"You hear," I said. "I have reason to believe that these men will take my life on this spot, if you do not help."

She turned her head, listening, and looked at me doubtfully.

"It is, perhaps, already too late," I said.

And I did feel it was so. Nevertheless, I was going on to the last inch, and turned from her in despair.

She came at me like a whirlwind, if you can imagine it, seizing my arm.

"Come!" she cried. "No need to walk or run, come in here. I live here."

She was fumbling in her bag for her key, the key of the very door against which I had been

standing, whilst the sound of the running feet became more clear and distinct. But she got the door open at last! We did not stay to shut it. Half scrambling, half stumbling up two flights of stone stairs, we arrived at the door of her flat. This time she had the key ready before we got there; but I was pushing at the door before she had time to turn the key. It was fine to hear the sound of a big bolt slipping home, and the rattle of a chain that put a stout door between me and my pursuers. I sank down on a chair in the hall; the reaction was almost too much for my self-control. The girl stood tense, pressed against the door. A clock beside me suddenly began to strike the hour. I was so startled that I rose suddenly, almost overturning the heavy chair.

"Hush!" she called softly, still listening.

I sank back ashamed. Seconds that seemed hours passed. In the end she came back to me, laying a quietening hand on my shoulder, and bending down.

"They are there!" she whispered. "But I think they can't make out which flat it is. Perhaps they are not even sure of the house."

She went back again to listen. A thundering fine girl: she wished to give me time to get hold of myself, before she brought me into publicity. I began to wonder what her friends would say to the guest she had introduced to the house.

Presently she returned.

"They are gone now," she said casually. "I don't think they are likely to come back, do you?"

Obviously the question was added so that she might hear my voice. I don't think she knew much about men. She put me on the same emotional level as any girl, and expected, I believe, that my inward agitation must be revealed by an audible sob. This amusing notion did me a lot of good.

"If that door can hold out," I said—and the calmness of my tone must have reassured her—"and the windows are beyond reach from the ground, I don't mind if they do come back."

"The door is very strong," she said, switching on the light. "And the flat is two stories up; they can never reach us that way."

I had thought it was higher, we had seemed so long in our ascent.

She was looking at me now, curiosity and pity mingled in her gaze, and I became horribly conscious of my tatterdemalion outfit. Stooping, I picked up her roll of music from the floor.

"Please, could I have a wash? I'll be very quiet, and not wake up any of your family."

She looked me full in the face.

"I may as well tell you that we are alone in the house."

Perhaps she was still a little afraid, for she kept her eyes fixed on me steadily.

I held out a very dirty hand to her. She took it unflinchingly.

When I had had a good wash I found her getting out some sort of a supper. She had lighted a fire which was crackling freely under a small kettle.

"You know," she said, busy with the plates, "I have very little to offer you. I don't bother much about food myself."

She glanced up at me as she spoke and stared. I wondered what could be the matter.

"I believe you are English?" She spoke in English.

"And you too?" I replied, astonished.

It was wonderful how cheering such a discovery was to me.

"Whom did you take me for?" I said as we sat down.

"For a Frenchman," she answered. "Your German was so bad."

"And an Apache at that, eh? Well, I don't mind." I had come to loathe Germans.

"Did you think I was a German?"

I lied bravely.

"No, not for a single moment."

She was indignant.

"Have you the audacity to say you thought my German bad?"

I made haste to put things right.

"My own German is too elementary to enable

me to set up for a judge of any one's German. It was not from that, but from your pity, and your quickness to understand."

She brushed this aside.

"Poof!" she said, mocking. "I was going to knock you down with my music."

While I ate she told me about herself—for this she declared was the one form of conversation that could be managed as a monologue.

Her name was Margarita Thompson, and she came from St. Andrews, Fife. She was a student of the piano, a private pupil of the famous August Hoffmann, with whom she had studied for four years. The money for her expenses she had made by a tour with three other girls in America and Canada. They had played as a quartette in all sorts of places. Were they never afraid? Well, only about finances. They had their ups and downs. Once, in Columbia, she was ill for two months with pneumonia and lost all her savings; so she had to begin again. As for other things, well, one of the girls, Felicity, had a special talent for freezing off unwelcome people.

"It was from her that you learned how to handle your music roll?" I asked.

Miss Thompson laughed.

"Felicity would not have done that. She never even spoke, she slew with a look."

The flat, she told me, belonged to an old teacher of music whom she sometimes helped.

He and his wife were away at Cassel, for a week, on family affairs.

When I had finished Miss Thompson made me extend my length on the couch and then brought me cigarettes.

It was very pleasant to lie there in peace and safety, and see her eyes dilate in astonishment, and all shades of emotion pass across her face, while she listened to my story.

I didn't know what she was like as a pianist. She must have talent, however, for Hoffmann to have given her four years; for I knew the great man did not waste his time on the inept or un-gifted. Many amusing stories were current which illustrated his short method with moneyed mediocrity. She was a pretty girl, with thick black lustreless hair, well-defined eyebrows and a pale face, which, in repose, had a great deal of gravity about it, but which, in certain moods, became elfish. There was, indeed, as I afterwards discovered, a big slice of the *gamin* in her. Character and individuality showed in every motion of hands and head; and, had she not been a pianist, I would have set her down as an actress of unusual quality.

I had nothing to be proud of in the story I unfolded to her. Perhaps there is no need of saying that to any one who, so far, has persisted with this narrative. Throughout I had been more or less of a simpleton—I use the word simpleton in place of another out of charity, not for myself

but because I am about to speak of exalted people. I had in fact scorned warnings in the superior manner of certain statesmen, and had refused to learn anything from events as they happened. The only difference between the politician and myself that could be put to my credit was that the effects of my stupidity fell on myself and on no others. And yet was this true? What was to happen to this brave girl who had saved me? Doubtless it was a fact that the ultimate shame of the statesman was not mine: I had not taken the money and neglected the duty; but, none the less, I had brought an enemy about that house. It would be a marked house henceforth, with hands, as numerous as they were unscrupulous, raised against it.

So as I lay and smoked, and told my tale, the mere telling served to illuminate and clarify my mind. I took a silent resolution. I must, it seemed, be stupid: I need not be base. And if ever a man's path of duty lay open and clear before him for once in this difficult world, it was then, when I saw that, at whatever personal cost, I must get away, and draw possible disaster from her. From these thoughts I opened my eyes, and looked at the girl. She was sitting on a cushion before the remains of the fire, engaged with her thoughts.

Perhaps she thought I was asleep. Later I came to know that this silence was a trick of hers. When one told her anything, as like as not the

tale would be answered by a long silence. To strangers this seemed to mean lack of interest. The fact was as far otherwise as it could be. She had no facile insincerities of speech to simulate an interest she did not feel; but those who knew her knew that it was her habit to pass in review what she had been told, or the talk of others to which she had listened. Every fact would be taken up, examined, turned over, fitted into any possible combination, set in relation to her past experience of life, and only when the process was completed would she feel that she might justifiably speak.

But I did not know all this then; and the silence resembled so much that silence which no man, perhaps, has ever entirely escaped; that which tells us it would be a grateful and refreshing sight to our host if he saw us uncross our legs and depart!

So I got up. I took out my watch; it was 2.30. Daylight would be here before long, and the best chance I had of getting away would be in darkness.

Miss Thompson took no notice of my action, sitting on with her thoughts, her arms around her knees, her fingers interlocked.

A chill came over my spirits. Had I seemed altogether a fool in her eyes? Well, though I was determined to remove myself, I can yet own that I would have been glad if she had opposed me, even if she had not meant it. A word, or a

good wish, was at least not too much to expect. Or—this thought came suddenly—did she not believe my story?

I stopped at the door.

"Is there, about the house, any old hat or a pair of shoes I might have?" I asked diffidently.

Miss Thompson looked up unmoved.

"I'll see in the morning," she said.

I smiled sadly and shook my head.

"In the morning! Alive or dead I'll be far enough away from the need of them, by then."

And I thought what a fine line that would make in a drama. It was all I could do to keep myself from folding my arms. But Miss Thompson was unimpressed.

"Aren't you comfortable here?" she asked. "I should think you have had enough adventures for one day."

There was about this something that recalled remonstrances familiar to my boyhood. It was the tone of an elder sister, or a much-worried mother, the mother who never feels easy in her mind about her boy except when he is in bed, and who inevitably gives her son the impression that she would like to keep him there for ever. In fact it made me laugh.

"You are very good," I said, "but I am already under heavy obligations to you; and every hour I shelter here increases my debt and your danger."

She would not, however, hear of it; and in

the end I had to say I must even depart without the shoes.

Upon that she seemed to capitulate, bidding me wait, and leaving the room to search for the shoes. But she returned almost at once, and said:

"If you must go, you'll have to leave by the window, for I have hidden the key. Besides, there's that packet you spoke of. You don't imagine I'm going to let you go without seeing what is in it to make all this fuss—as if any woman would let it go unopened. I don't think you know much about women, Mr. Abercromby."

And there was not much a man could say to that. Still it was, I fear, with an ill grace that I surrendered.

She went over to the window and threw back the heavy blue curtain.

"Look!" she cried. "The night has almost gone. It is clear enough for you to be seen, and yet there are no people about for your protection."

I looked out, and it was almost as she said. The lamps of the big square shone brightly down there in the dark. But the sky beyond showed signs of the coming day, and over the houses I could distinguish the three hundred feet of St. Peter's rising above the city roofs. Yet it was far from being daylight. I peered through the glass, till I felt the chill on my forehead, for sign of any one, but on the street level there was too little light to distinguish what might be lurking

there. She let the curtain drop and I followed her to the table. To tell the truth I was not sorry to stay. And I wanted to see the contents of that fateful packet more, perhaps, than I had ever in boyhood wanted to explore the inside of a toy-drum, which is saying much. But I allow that the contents of a toy-drum are often a disappointment, in spite of the fact, as I now recall, that gentlemen engaged in the trade of toy-drum making seem to know that their handiwork would sooner or later be disintegrated. And so the more benevolent, and far-sighted, among them made provision against total disillusionment by enclosing certain pictures so highly coloured as to hold a reasonable prospect of satisfaction to the youthful explorer.

As I sat at the table, with the girl leaning over me, to cut open that little package it was with a thrill of triumph that I remembered I had lived, in spite of them all, to see another day. For, if I had baffled them of one day, why not of two, or twenty years? I knew now more of their methods, and was myself fully awake. They had taught me a lot indeed, but I had not perished in the learning. Further, I was in the act of opening the packet, which Wohlenhaupt had sworn I would never live to do. Miss Thompson, in her impatience, laid a hand on my shoulder, and shook me.

"Be quick!" she said.

So I took the thing up. Some of the shiny

coating had come off in irregular spots that showed the rough white texture of the cloth beneath.

The girl drew in a chair and sat down close beside me. We were both strung to a pretty high pitch of excitement. My hand trembled so that I could scarcely insert the scissors she thrust upon me. I could hear her breathing, close to me, come troubled and unevenly. I got the string cut at last, blaming the bluntness of her scissors, and unfolded the ends of the outer casing. Miss Thompson laid her hand gently on my arm as I did so. At first I thought this was from her uncontrollable curiosity, and smiled to myself at it; but the pressure of her fingers increased to such an extent as to discommode me at my task, and then to such a degree as almost to give me pain. She had the fine strong fingers of the pianist.

Surprised, I looked up, and found her stiff and rigid with attention. But the attention was not for the half-opened packet. She was leaning away from me, listening at something she heard.

"For heaven's sake," I whispered, "what is it? Do you hear anything?"

She turned her white face towards me, pale to the lips.

"Listen!"

I guessed at the word rather than heard it. She motioned with her other hand towards the door, still holding on to my arm. We both held

our breath, with strained attention. At first I heard nothing, and was beginning to think it was only her imagination, overwrought with the unwonted excitement and want of sleep. But no! Her finer ear, trained to a more delicate perception of sounds than mine, had not deceived her. For as I bent to listen I could distinguish a faint, far-away sound, a strange curious sound, quite indescribable in its cat-like stealth and softness. It was a horrible sound that made my blood run hot and cold.

"They are there," she murmured.

"Do you mean at the door of the room?" I asked.

She shook her head.

"I am not sure—I don't know—I cannot tell quite where it comes from," she stammered.

And indeed it was a thing so faint, and yet so pervading, as to have no contact with locality.

When I hear men talking together in smoking-rooms about fear, and strange fearful experiences in queer places of the world, I do not speak of this experience of mine; but I understand them.

I tried to rally her.

"It is perhaps the people in the flat below us, a servant moving about."

She shook her head again.

"There is no one below us; it is an empty flat."

We waited.

At last it grew to be such an intolerable

strain as to be beyond endurance. I got up and whispered to her:

"Wait there; I am going to explore."

The girl was beside me, when, with infinite precaution, I opened the door that led into the hall. At first I did not know whether, hearing us, they had stopped work, or whether I ceased to hear because I had gone farther away from the sound. Out there in the dark hall there was nothing but the steady solemn tick-tick-tick of the big clock.

Then I heard the sound begin again; but now it was clearer and more defined; and I knew I was nearer.

I went back to her where she was standing in the radiance of the half-opened dining-room door.

"They are there," I said. "They are doing something to the outer door."

She leaned against the wall and said nothing.

"We cannot switch on the light," I said, "for they would see it. But if you had an electric torch I could use that with safety."

She went away at once, and as I waited I experienced bitter self-reproach at having involved her in such an affair, now realising that even if she came out of it with her life any tragedy in the house that would lead to police investigation would be a terrible affair for her. But for that I might have got assistance readily enough from a crowd of neighbours, by calling from the windows. The cost to her, however, was more

than I was prepared to see her pay. And I was fortified in this resolution by the big rage that now began to rise within me. It was that wild, tearing passion that makes a man see red, as they say, in me all the more powerful because I was ashamed of the fear that had preceded it, and had become again conscious, not only of manhood, but of my own individual manhood. And I have a fancy, before expressed, that the world does not contain a more dangerous man than one who has been afraid and has surmounted the fear.

So I made up my mind to tackle whatever might be lurking behind that door, and nothing I could imagine would, at that moment, have induced me to open a window and yelp for assistance. I almost rejoiced to think that the girl was too unstrung to think of such a thing; I felt I could crack a dozen of their heads against the wall, as a cook cracks eggs against a plate. It was a good moment; and I seemed to hear a sort of wild song singing in my head, and its refrain was "Rejoice, O young man, in thy strength!"

The girl came back as I was taking off my coat. I took the torch from her, and went forward to the door.

Passing the little circle of light it made across the broad superficies, I could distinguish nothing at all. I looked first at the hinges. Almost always it is easier to break into a house by operating on the hinges than by bothering with pick-

locks, or running risks with false keys. I had this information from a notorious burglar whom I attended in Aberdeen Infirmary, when he broke his leg in one of his unproductive ventures. He gave me the information, he said, as being of more value than a fee—to which, by the way, I had no claim. For, as he explained, grinning, to save expense modern builders fasten their hinges to a thin strip of wood nailed to the wall, and a very little pressure with the perfect purchase which the wall itself affords will remove this slip of wood, and the hinges and the door. But no such danger lay here, for this door was so heavy that the hinges had had to be sunk in the solid walls. It was a good door, of which the maker had no cause to be ashamed. And the strength of that chain was enough to resist any purchase that could be brought to bear on it.

Switching off the torch I got my ear on the door, and found that the noise came from a particular spot less than half-way up.

It seemed to me they were cutting a hole at the very bottom of the upper panel. A hole the size of a man's hand would be sufficient to permit them to take the chain off; but though a chain is a far stiffer problem than a lock there would still remain the lock. But was the door locked? It is a simple business to unlock any door from the outside when the key is left in it: it only requires a special pair of pincers. But the key was not in it, yet, stay—perhaps it had been

turned before the key was removed. I dared not examine the lock with the torch so close to the keyhole, and my fingers gave me no information as to whether the tongue of the lock was still shot. Anyway, it did not matter a great deal, for my plan of action was now thought out. This stealthy attack was necessary for them. They thought I would, if I heard them, throw up the window and call for help. Chivalrous Germany! Well, it was good for me that such was their reasoning as to the probable conduct a gentleman was likely to follow.

I needed a length of good strong rope and a bell. The first Miss Thompson supplied from her travelling trunk.

"Now I need some one who is quick-handed and smart," I said.

"Are you going to keep them out?"

I took her back into the room while I was making a noose at one end of the rope.

"I am going to put this on one of them."

She clasped her hands tremulously.

"Are you going to hang anyone?" she whispered.

"We'll see," I said grimly. "And now, the bell. What I want if possible is a bell you wind up, the kind that rings with a spring. No other will do."

By good luck there was such a one in the house, one of those bells for the table; this one big and in the shape of a tortoise. It was

rung by pressing down either the head or the tail.

"Now I'll tell you what you must do."

"Oh, do not look at me so fiercely!" she cried.

I took firm hold of her.

"Miss Thompson, attend to what I say quietly. I want you to take this torch and stand by me in the hall with your foot against mine. You will hold the torch in the position I show you, and when you feel me press your foot you will throw on the light. Is that clear? That's all you have to do till you next hear my voice. Till then whatever you see and hear you must make no outcry, not a sound, mind."

She drew herself together with an effort.

"Yes," she said simply, and tried to smile.

We went out into the dark hall, close up to the door, and I put her with the torch in position. She trembled a little. I passed the other end of the rope round one of the two pillars that made an ornamental arch in the hall, fastening it securely. Then I came back beside her. So we waited.

It was awful waiting there in the dark, but worse for her. I knew what was about to happen; she did not. Her hand came out seeking for me. This was not included in my instructions, but I could not help giving it a reassuring squeeze. She returned the pressure gently, and released my hand.

So the clock ticked on, and the soft whining sound came through the door.

At last, after what seemed an eternity, my ear warned me that the moment was at hand. I thought I knew exactly what course events would take. There came a little rending sound, and then silence. This troubled me, for according to my calculations, the disc of wood ought to have fallen on the floor, and it was for the sound of this I waited. But there was no sound. Yet that which happened next was according to anticipations. A long spear of light shone through the circular aperture, moving this way and that, from side to side, and up and down, and reaching to the far end of the hall. Behind me I heard Miss Thompson's involuntary catch of breath, and perhaps in two minutes the light was withdrawn and we were in the dark again. This was the critical moment for which I was waiting: one second too soon or too late would ruin all. The instant the light disappeared I faced the aperture, and at once heard the sound for which I waited, the slight brushing sound of bare flesh against the sawn wood of the round hole. My foot went out to the girl's, quickly and softly, and the flash of her torch which followed let my straining eyes see a long, dirty, sinewy and hairy arm feeling its way towards the chain. It filled the aperture so that our light was not seen. I had time to slip the noose on to it, but I had to be quick with the pull. A startled,

strangled scream, from the other side of the door, rent the silence asunder, as I pulled tight, and a wild jerk on the rope followed that nearly pulled me off my feet.

"Now!" I shouted to Miss Thompson, and together we had him safe.

Pulling the right arm up to the shoulder, I fastened the rope tight round the pillar, and then saw the arm protruding straight and taut into the hall. The man kicked and bumped against the door, and four or five voices jabbered questions at him.

It was time to bring my bell into action. I gave three sharp rings.

"Are you there, are you there?" "Ah!" "British Legation. Please. Thank you!"

A silence fell, and the voices of our enemies ceased. I *heard* them listening.

Miss Thompson's curiosity mastered her fear. She came close to me.

"What are you doing?" she asked.

"Calling for help," I answered quietly.

"But—but—that will not bring any help to us," she stammered.

Then she turned the torchlight full on my face, scanning me, evidently thinking I had become demented.

"The last thing I want to do is to bring any help here," I answered.

"But——" she said uncertainly, and the light began to shake and quiver in her hand.

"Put that light out," I said peremptorily, not thinking at all, at the time, how this must confirm her fear that I had gone mad.

She obeyed. Then I again began to ring the bell.

"That the British Legation?" . . . "Can you send at once to Görlitzer Platz, No. 7. Important papers. No, can't wait. Men outside trying to force entrance." . . . "Yes! Imperative! Motor . . . Very good. . . . Yes. . . . Oh yes!" . . . "Oh yes, rather! I can certainly hold out for that time. Thank you."

I began to whistle cheerfully. Somewhere in a room close by, I heard the sound of a girl's muffled sobbing—only sub-consciously, for my real hearing was given to the other side of that door. The man we had trussed up no longer screamed; but through his dull moans I could hear the hurried whispering. Then there was a queer, muffled noise. A little after a quick tap, tap, tapping, as of many feet descending the staircase, and dying gradually away.

I threw aside the curtains from the big window in the front. It was full day and people were astir. Opposite I saw a baker, with his morning bread, passing from house to house. Men on their way to work took a diagonal course across the square, in groups of twos and threes. A milk cart rattled on the cobbles below.

When I was sure the course was clear I went

back to secure my captive. I had not much to offer him in the way of pity. Still, he had received a shock that had sent him into a funk, a craven fellow I thought, quite ready to stick a knife into another, but squealing with fear when caught himself. It was a grim satisfaction to me to think I had caught one of them. As I looked at his arm protruding through the door, however, I recognised that there was a mighty stiff strain on it, and that one could not occupy the position he was in, pulled tight up against the door, without very soon suffering an agony that was real enough. Arming myself with the poker, I did not anticipate that there would be much fight left in him. It would be quite easy to use the rope and twist it round his arm and legs, and put him through a leisurely cross-examination. So I removed the chain and opened the door.

I was surprised at the amount of pressure put upon it from the other side. For one wild moment I thought the gang had simply taken a leaf out of my own book and given me an imitation of the sound of feet descending a stair, while remaining to pounce on me, the moment I was incautious enough to open the door for them. But no, that was not the pressure. It was the weight of the man I had caught, and his weight jerked the door from my hand. He fell headlong into the hall.

His throat was cut from ear to ear.

CHAPTER V

HOW long I stood looking down at the body I don't know. The man lay sprawling on his back, the bare arm that was still tied by the rope held up in the air, as if in protest or surprise at the injustice or suddenness of his end. He was a short, thick-set man, very bald, with a dark brown beard. I had never seen him before. There was a significance about this body that it took me some time to understand. Hitherto I had been made aware of the fact that these men were ready enough to take the lives of any who opposed them. Now it was being made plain to me that they were ready, in certain circumstances, to sacrifice the lives of those who helped them. They feared this man might be made to speak!

I knew at what moment his death took place: it was when they heard me call up the British Embassy. They were afraid of it! It was strange and awful to think that my ring on that old tortoise bell, a bell that had been innocently fashioned to bring some one's dinner, had at last suddenly summoned death to this man. Well indeed might he retain that arm extended in an

attitude of ludicrous amazement. I wondered what he could have told me! Well, they had sealed his lips fast enough, and permanently.

Of course he told me that this packet they sought did not hold the product of any mere vulgar burglary or forgery: it had to do with some matter of high international politics. I had been lucky with my mention of the British Embassy; it had sent every rascalion of them into headlong flight.

But for how long? Cutting the rope, I shut and bolted the door. They would soon see that no one came to my aid. And I did not dream that, even in broad daylight, they would permit me to walk up the steps of the British Embassy with these papers in my pocket. Perhaps, too, they were mere underlings, these fellows who had attacked the door, and had gone away for bigger people, or new instructions.

Had I been by myself I would of course have cleared out of the house on the instant; but there was Miss Thompson to consider, and this body. What sort of a man would he be who would yield to the temptation to seize the favourable moment, open the door, slip out quietly, and vanish? And, later, the girl would come out of that room into which she had locked herself, and finding me gone would come on *that* lying there. The thought roused me to action. She must not find the body there when she came out. Here was something to be done! There was a cup-

board in the hall, and with little difficulty I got the body of the stranger inside, covering it with the rug on which he had fallen. So far, so good. Then I went and knocked at the closed door. It was quite quiet within.

"Miss Thompson!" I called.

She thought, then, I had gone crazy when I played that bedlam-like game with the imaginary telephone. Perhaps, if she had been a little more clear-headed than one could justly expect after her experiences of the night, she would have seen a method in my madness. As it happened, however, it was very well that she had been out of the way.

"Miss Thompson!" I called again, tapping more loudly, and putting on my most matter-of-fact tone. "Will you tell me where I can find something to drink?"

There was no response for a little. But I suppose she argued with herself that it was a sign of sanity to ask for something to drink, just as it would have been a sign of insanity had I called through the door for a hatchet. Anyway I heard the bed creak as the girl got up and came to the door.

"You are alive?"

"Rather!" I called back. "And they've all cleared off. Pretended to telephone to the British Embassy you know; that did it."

She unlocked the door and showed me a white, tear-stained face.

"I thought you were——" she hesitated.

"Dead?" I suggested. "No, I take a lot of killing." She shuddered. "What I want at the moment is a thing I have never set much store by, and one I never thought I could wish for so much." Her eyes opened inquiringly—the infallible way to lift any woman out of her own trouble is to ask her to help you with yours—"Just a glass of Scotch whisky."

"Would cognac do?" she asked doubtfully.

"Fine!" I replied, clapping my hands.

So she hunted out a bottle, and after much persuasion had some of it herself. The colour came back to her face, the little she had, and the courage to her heart, and of that she had much.

For you see I'm not pretending that the girl was anything superhuman, as she would need to have been to have kept her courage up, and she standing between a madman and a set of bloody murderers.

"It is good," said Miss Thompson.

She alluded to the cognac; for I was pouring myself out another helping.

"It is so," I agreed. "There's maybe not the inspiration in it that there is in good whisky; still I cannot say that I have found it unsuggestive."

Perhaps she thought this incoherent, and rather wild, for there was a trace of anxiety in her glance. I made haste to reassure her by laying my hand on hers across the table, and found

that this act was rather worse than the word. She withdrew her hand, alarmed.

"Oh, Miss Thompson, I am neither mad nor drunk," I blurted out. "It's just—it's just that I've seen a way by which possibly, mind you I say possibly, not probably, much less certainly, you and I may get out of this hole we're in."

"I am in?" she asked.

"I am sorry to say it, and sorrier still that it should be through me; but it is true. You cannot stay on in this house. It is a marked place now, and your life would not be safe."

She thought awhile.

"I don't think I could stay on in it after this night alone, but I have friends who will take me in. When you are safely away I'll shut up the house and go to them."

I shook my head.

"To be quite frank I doubt if you'll be safe in this country for a while."

She was taken aback at that.

"Surely," she said, "that is too much."

"Indeed, I fear it is not," I said gravely. "And to me it is so sure a thing that, to save time, of which, I suspect, we have but little to spare, I may as well tell you that unless you go with me I will not go at all. If I have, without wishing it, brought you into danger, the least I can do is to get you out of it, and see you safely to your own country."

She thought for a time over this, her elbows on the table.

"Well," she said at length, "in any case I was going home for the summer in three weeks."

"Capital!" I cried. "That settles it, and the sooner the better."

She went away at once.

There was still one more difficulty before me. What was I to do with the dead man? It was not only that the thought of leaving him in that cupboard revolted me, blackguard as I had good reason to believe him to be. It was not even the consideration of the unfairness of such a proceeding to the absent tenants of the flat; much more it was the thought of the hue and cry that would be raised after the suddenly departed girl, when the tenant came back, and found the grisly occupant of the cupboard, on going to hang up his hat. Miss Thompson returned while I was still busy with these thoughts. She was dressed for travelling, and carried a hand-bag and a pair of boots.

"Try them on while I search for a hat for you," she said.

I stared at her, fingering my glass.

"So you think there is nothing to do but to get up and walk straight out into the street?"

"What else is there to do?" she asked, surprised.

"It isn't that I have no money——" I began, blushing.

She interrupted hastily:

"I have over twenty pounds in this bag."

So like a woman that, to keep all her money in the house! And how much reason I had to bless her for it!

"It isn't only that," I answered; "great as that is. These men will move heaven and earth to get the papers I have. No doubt I could walk out, but I should not walk far, and at any rate would never get away. They will follow me wherever I go, and no man can go on for ever. Sooner or later their chance will come, and I cannot always surround myself with people even in the daylight."

"Then, it seems to me you are telling me we may as well stay where we are?"

"Exactly, unless we can throw them off the scent for a few hours."

"And then?" she said.

"Get a start for Scotland."

"But they will follow you there, won't they?"

"I am not so sure it would be worth their while," I answered. "Anyway I cannot escape them in Germany, for here an Englishman is always conspicuous, but there a foreigner is even more so; and I could be on my guard there."

"I see that," said Miss Thompson. "The positions would be reversed."

"Precisely so," I cried.

"But we cannot get safely across the square, much less to Scotland."

"Can't we?" I cried—for this was the point at which I aimed to bring her—"you forget that I told you I had an inspiration a while back."

Miss Thompson sat down.

"You know a way out?"

"I do."

"Tell me what it is," she said simply. "For I see it is something you want me to do."

Now that was just the mood and the mind to which the girl had to be worked up: she had to be ready to do what I asked, without questioning or suggestions. She had to understand, but neither too little nor too much.

The shops were beginning to open when she left, with instructions to spare no expense in procuring a large strong packing-case, and in getting it sent round to the flat as soon as possible. She had then to find out a firm of carriers who would undertake to call at the address for a heavy packing-case at ten o'clock exactly.

From behind the curtains I watched for the arrival of the case, and it came sooner than I expected. By the time Miss Thompson returned I was nailing it down, and making all secure with the rope that had already served me so well. She was mightily astonished.

"I thought you were going to escape in it?" she said.

"No, they would just follow it; a box has no legs."

"Then it's just a bluff that you are in the box?"

"A double bluff," I answered.

She was curious to know what I had put in the box, and I assured her I had taken nothing that would be considered of any value. It yet wanted some time before the carriers were due to arrive, so I passed it by burning one or two air-holes with the poker.

When the men arrived I kept out of sight, and before they carried the box downstairs Miss Thompson instructed them to leave it at the cloak-room, taking a ticket for it if she had not arrived there in time to do so herself. In that event one of them must wait by the office till she, or some one she would send, came to receive the ticket.

When they were gone we shook hands.

"Mind," I said to her, "two tickets for Hamburg by the 10.30. If I am not there, you still go on. The Gibson boat for Leith leaves at midnight. You understand?" ✓

"Yes," she answered, "I understand." And she followed the men downstairs.

Through the spy-hole which, alas, I had cut in the Professor's curtain, I saw the packing-case crossing the square, and Miss Thompson a short distance behind. This procession seemed to interest a man on a ladder cleaning windows. I

saw him come hastily down and follow it. I gave them five minutes' start by the clock and then slipped on the immense waterproof coat the Professor had left behind, and appropriated his umbrella also.

The ease of my exit was almost comical. My thoughts on the way to the station were not unpleasant. I was thinking of how the porter would, as he stood waiting for the lady, be approached by a pleasant-spoken gentleman who would explain that the lady was detained unavoidably, and had commissioned him to take possession of the cloak-room ticket. And I saw too, in my imagination, and, had this been a real romance, I should have said I beheld it as a fact, a motor with a large packing-case, speeding rapidly from the railway station, while inside the vehicle were two men with evil, gloating faces. I pictured them carrying that case into some horrid habitation of their own where Death could be meted out in safety. And I saw their faces when the lid was rent open, and they came on the calm upturned face of the unexpected occupant.

There was something in this that satisfied me. They had passed a dead man into my hands in compromising circumstances. It seemed certain that, sooner or later, Miss Thompson and I would be incriminated. Well, I had turned what was intended to be an incriminating incubus into a means of escape, and after it had

served this purpose had returned it into their eager hands.

Best of all Miss Thompson did not dream of its existence.

We travelled to Hamburg in separate compartments, arriving about five o'clock. From the station I saw Miss Thompson, according to my instructions, take a cab and drive away to the Leith steamer. It was much safer for her that we should not be seen together. Long before this they would be aware of my escape, and no doubt were already well on the trail. The problem that confronted me was to fill in the hours that yet lay between the present moment and the boat's departure, which was not till midnight. It would be no use for me to attempt going on board now, for I had no doubt that, by this time, the police had been notified, and I should simply be taken off the boat on a warrant for alleged complicity in the Keppelstrasse affair. I must make an attempt to discover whether the police were in it or no before risking myself. There was another train from Berlin due to arrive at 8.30, and I judged that it would arrive with a party of anxious searchers.

I sought out a café in an obscure part of the town, and there I made a good meal in a very leisurely fashion. I put in another hour or two with coffee and the newspapers and a pipe. People came in and went out again; but I sat on,

and no one gave any heed to me. Still, the inaction was horribly irksome, and the thought that all the while my enemies might be spreading their net throughout that dirty city was one that did not conduce to restfulness. I would have given much to have filled in the time with an examination of Henschel's papers; but in that place it would have been extremely dangerous, and I forbore.

Shortly before eight the tedium became insupportable, and I had to get up and do something. It was a very rash thing that I did, but, as it was raining heavily and I had the Professor's voluminous coat and umbrella to hide in, I thought I might have a look at the arrival of the Berlin train. A great many people were waiting at the barrier, so perhaps the risk was not much. I, however, got no information, for I saw no one that I recognised. What I did get was a big fright. It came about in this way. From my place in the crowd I saw, against the barrier, a well-dressed portly man whose broad face seemed somehow familiar. I puzzled my memory, and before the arrival for whom he was waiting had emerged I had placed him.

He was unknown to me, but bore a resemblance to Baron von Bieberstein, whose portrait had struck me, when it was published in the papers after the Baron's sudden death in London. But it wasn't that that gave me the fright. It was a laugh I heard. Do what I could, it was

impossible to see from whom it came, the crowd was too dense. It was from some one the man I had noticed met; I could not believe that Dewinski had recovered so soon. The uncertainty shook me a little. It must be something extraordinarily good to force a laugh from him; for though he might have recovered sufficiently to travel I was fairly sure he did not feel well enough to laugh lightly. That laugh irritated and discomfited me. I wondered if it had anything to do with Miss Thompson. What had been happening during all these hours? For a while I wandered aimlessly about, a prey to disquietude.

When it was dusk I made my way towards the river, and the long dock at the end of which the *Fenella* was berthed. The rain was still falling steadily, and the heavy surcharged clouds that overhung the city promised that the night would be both dark and wet. There was a line of railway on one side of the quay, and a long string of idle trucks. When it was dark enough, I climbed into one of them. Each waggon seemed to have a tarpaulin cover folded ready on the floor, prepared for the unloading of some expected vessel. I was glad enough to draw a few folds of one of these over me for shelter. An occasional cab went by, and now and then footsteps approached from the direction of the city and passed on. It was not till I had been some time sheltering there that I made the dis-

covery that all traffic was being stopped further down.

At first I gave little heed to this, knowing that it was the practice to fling a temporary barrier across the quay and make intending passengers show their tickets. Nevertheless, I judged it might be wise to get a closer look, and so, when it was completely dark, I stole from waggon to waggon until I was fairly over the barrier of white-painted hurdles. In the last waggon I crouched down and listened. For a long while I heard nothing but the "plip-plop" the water made against the quay, and the patter of the rain upon the tarpaulin. Venturing to look over the side of the waggon, I saw below me, in the light of the storm-lantern that was swinging in the wind, a little shelter-office on small wheels. By and by I heard the rumble of a cab. The occupants, a stout, choleric gentleman and his wife, were very angry at being stopped at the barrier. He was evidently a person of some consequence, well known to the officials, who were almost deferential in their bearing towards him.

"What the devil does this mean, eh?" he asked.

"It is the order, sir."

"Can I not guess that! Do you suppose I took this for a whim of yours?"

At this point some one seemed to step up close to the old fellow, and say something to him

in low tones. I could not possibly catch what passed, but whatever it was it silenced protest. It can be imagined how sorry I was to miss what was said. Still, I did hear something. The old gentleman appeared to have passed through the narrow wicket, and before going on made this comment.

"Curious affair that! Was reading about it in the train. Well, I hope you will catch him. Good night, officer."

"Good night, sir."

Then the old gentleman passed on; the officials retired to their shelter; and the bleak, wind-swept quay was silent once more, save for the lapping water and the pattering rain.

I lay half covered by the sheet for some time. If they could mention the hunt after me in this semi-public fashion, the one sure inference to be drawn was that some personage of high political importance had arranged matters with the police. My little business was assuredly going to be connected with the mysterious affair in the Keppelstrasse! Enlightenment broke on me. I could see it all, down even to the brief notice that would appear in the *Tageblatt* to-morrow. They did not in the least desire to arrest me in Berlin: they desired, and meant, to arrest me on this dark, lonely, rain-swept quay. And the notice that would appear in the newspaper would run:

"THE STRANGE AFFAIR IN THE KEPPELSTRASSE.

"Some new light on this mysterious affair comes to hand in the report that reaches us of the arrest of a young Englishman, at Hamburg, last night. This man was known to be connected with the event, and was arrested on the quay, when on the point of joining the boat due to leave for England at midnight. The man, though cleverly disguised, was unable to escape the vigilance of the police. What strengthened the presumption of his guilt is the fact that he made a most desperate resistance, and being a man of powerful physique succeeded in momentarily freeing himself, jumping over the edge of the quay in an attempt to escape. Despite prompt and diligent search no trace of him could be discovered, and he is presumed to have been drowned."

And that would be all! No, it wouldn't! A day or so later there would be this:

"THE MYSTERIOUS AFFAIR AT THE KEPPEL-
STRASSE.

"The body of the young Englishman, whose arrest and attempted escape were recorded in our columns, was yesterday discovered in the dock at Hamburg. There was a large contused wound on the head, which, it is presumed, was received

from his coming into contact with the dock wall in his leap for liberty, and which accounts for the fact that no trace of him could be found in the search that immediately followed his escape. It is regretted that his death is likely to deprive the general public of any further light on a strange affair that roused considerable interest and curiosity."

Then the case would be closed, and then they would be satisfied. There was a neatness in the grim humour of it that was not without its appeal to my nature; and I could not but admit that if they succeeded, it would be quite as well rounded off, and poetic, as my own work in getting them to steal the packing-case that held the witness to their crime. As a mental satisfaction it would indeed be better, since with them would be the last word.

It may seem strange to some that such thoughts should occupy me as I lay in a damp waggon on the Hamburg quay. I can only say that I did so think. What, however, I saw as I lay there, with the rain gathering in little lochs on the sheet above me, was that I must be up and doing if I would escape this obituary renown.

I crawled my way back over the waggons. Once I almost jumped and ran for it when my foot slipped on a rain-sodden buffer and sent an iron coupling swinging noisily. Crouching low, I waited; but either they never heard or else took

it for the swing of their own lantern, and none came out to see. When I judged it safe, I got down from the trucks and in the end reached the streets. There were few people about on such a night. The quarter of the town in which I found myself was of a kind that belongs to all big seaports, mean streets of cheap lodging-houses, small-windowed, narrow-doored shops, changers of foreign money, chandlery, post-cards and curios, and a multitude of beer-houses, frequented by sailors from under every flag that sails the seas.

The small shops were mostly closed now, but the beerhouses were in full swing, noisy and bright with lights that made the wet pavement glisten like glass. As I was passing one of them I heard a voice in full uproarious song. All around, there were many such voices, only of better quality, mostly, than the particular voice that caught my ear. It was in fact the words that stopped me:

“Gae bring to me a pint of wine,
And fill it in a silver tassie
That I may drink, before I go,
A service to my bonnie lassie.

“The boat rocks at the pier o’ Leith,
Fu’ loud the wind blows frae the ferry.
The shouts of war are heard afar,
And I must leave my bonnie Mary.”

Heavens! How the words of that song chimed to the thoughts that echoed in my head. The pier o’ Leith! Ay, that was it; but would I

ever see it? Out there in the dark, at the end of the quay wall, lay the boat that would carry me safe enough; but between me and that home-like boat there was just the narrow line of white-painted hurdle across which I could see no way at all. And, standing there with water tumbling noisily on the pavement from the overflowing gutters on the house-roofs, it was strange how that most drunken and untuneful voice within should fill me with such a feeling of home-sickness as touched the point of desolation. I am ashamed to say it, but for a moment I was almost unmanned.

"Damn the fellow!" I cried angrily, moving on out of ear-shot.

And certainly it was no proper emotion to indulge in, in view of the job yet before me. But when I got my breath again I began to wonder whether, perhaps, chance had not thrown something useful in my way. It might be that the songster was one of the hands of the *Fenella* of Leith. At any rate he was a countryman of mine, and must be off some English boat. At the worst I could get a letter or a message through to Miss Thompson, and—well, others. It was worth trying. He could cross that barrier if I could not!

I ran back lest I should be too late and the man be gone, fearful, too, that I might fail to identify the particular house among its many fellows. The last fear, at least, was groundless;

for, while yet afar off, I could distinguish the rough voice that was now become dulcet to my changed ear. I swung the door open, letting out a sudden babel of mingled voices. Now what I had pictured to myself was a rough deck-hand, in the midst of companions like himself, equally making merry with their shore-leave; and I was wondering how I might detach one of them, so as to secure his private ear. But I saw when I entered that though many men were seated round little tables, talking, drinking, and laughing together, the man with the song sat at a table alone. At first I put it down to the quality of his voice. Soon I came to know the true cause. As I stood inside the door for a moment, dazzled by the bright lights, and with the rain dripping from my big coat on to the sawdust floor, an unseen clock, after a preliminary flourish of rippling chimes, solemnly ladled out ten strokes.

CHAPTER VI

THE man who was singing all by himself paid not the slightest attention to me as I sat down at his table. He was a powerfully-built fellow clad in blue dungarees, fresh-complexioned and square-jawed. The hair on which his leather peaked cap lay tilted up was red.

"You seem to be very happy," I said, as I gave my order and filled my pipe.

He looked me up and down with a truculent eye.

"Ay," he said. "What makes you think so?"

"You were singing just now."

"Singing?" he cried. "What has that got to do wi' it? As a matter o' fact I was mourn-in'."

"Indeed," I answered in surprise. "May I ask for what, or whom?"

He began fingering in his waistcoat pocket and drew out a short, and very dirty clay pipe, which he pointed at me, as he felt elsewhere for a match.

"Sir," he said, with a ludicrous air of dignity,

"you will pardon me, but it is not habitual with Scotsmen to be noisy about their private feelings; nor," he added, holding out the burning match, "to discuss them with comparative strangers."

So saying, he canted his head on one side so that his nose might avoid contact with the bowl of his pipe, and sent the lighted match bobbing up and down with the vigour of his suction. I had got hold of a character. The rebuke he administered was mollified by the fact that he was, at least, prepared to accept me as only a comparative stranger. A little wariness would certainly be necessary: that red hair did not belie a fiery disposition.

"I am Scotch myself," I said, "and I hope it will be a long day before the sympathy of one Scot is unwelcome to another."

He shoved a mighty fist across the marble-topped table.

"Put it there!" he cried.

So I put it there, and we shook on it.

When the usual toasts had been duly honoured, I made haste with the talk, at first only that he might not get too hazy in the head to carry my message, but soon for his own sake, as I came to like Alec Duff, for so he told me he was called.

"You were saying you were mourning," I prompted him.

"Ay, so I was, that was over the case of poor Geordie Anderson."

"A sailor, like yourself, from the *Fenella*?"

"A sailor!" he said, in a meditative, argumentative tone. "Dod! it's hard to tell what a sailor is nowadays. You might call me, who am a stoker, and never sets an eye on the sea, a sailor, for it's the engines that sail the boat; and you might deny that Geordie, who is a deckhand, is a sailor, for deck-hands are just stewards' assistants in stormy weather, as I often tell him."

"Has he had an accident?" I pushed on.

Duff withdrew his pipe.

"No just what ye could call an accident," he said. "But nevertheless he's up there in the Infirmary the night, and there for a while I'm thinking." He thrust a thumb mechanically into the pipe. "Look here," he went on, "I must be going in a wee, and I'd best tell ye the story straight off the reel. It was like this."

"Is it a long story?" I asked, for I had heard the clock signal the half-hour some time back.

The question brought about a resumption of his earlier stateliness of manner and diction.

"My stories," he said, "are of no specially fixed length, but are adaptable to the precise amount of intelligence observable in them that listen."

When I had repaired my blunder he cleared his throat and was about to resume, but brought up suddenly on seeing the paper and ink laid out before me. They were for the note I intended he should carry to Miss Thompson.

"Ye're no purposing to take down what I say so as to use it against me hereafter?" he asked suspiciously.

I was really beginning to feel on tenter-hooks.

"No, no!" I assured him. "It's just a short note in a hurry. I'll tell you all about it afterwards. I can hear you while I scribble."

"Well," he nodded, "it was like this. Me and Anderson set out this morning wi' every intention o' spending the day in decency. Geordie was most particular about it, and to me the notion was at least a change; but now, looking back, I can see that somehow the idea was not equally agreeable to the mind of Providence. But poor Anderson was fair set on peace and quietness. No sooner had we steppit ashore than he took me by the arm, and says he, 'Alec my man, we'll just make a real, quiet day of it for the sake of variety. So mind, nane of your usual cantrips and ongoin's, my bonnie lad. There's to be nae throwing off of your coat and hat in the middle o' the street and inviting the whole German nation to come forrit; and,' says he, 'if so be as we go into any genteel restiraunt ye're no to dook any Dutchman's face into his broth, just because ye don't like the noisy way he sups it,' says he, 'as ye did last trip in Amsterdam,' he says. So I gave him my hand on it, and meant it too. The strange thing is it was Geordie himsel' that first hit a man the day. We began well by going for

a jaunt on the top o' one o' them cars, sitting side by side, quite quiet-like as if we were on the way to kirk, and it Sunday. It was na' our fault that we did not keep it up a' day, I'm telling ye. But I never jaloused it wis fated to last for so little a time; for the end came very premature, as you might say.

"In keeping wi' our general demeanour we were smoking very genteel, not spitting on the floor at all, but always taking care to put it on to the street. Well, there were two foreigners sitting in front of us, each with a long ceegar in his mouth, but no' a match among them. By and by one of them says something to us, and I knew he was asking for a match. And so I, with my new manners, to please Geordie, instead of following the usual way of handing him one, handed him the whole box, wi' a polite boo. Would you believe it, he had no sooner gotten it in his hand and looked at it, when he dashed my box on the floor, and stamped on it wi' his heel. It fair took me aback. Then he turned blazin' on us. 'England,' he said, 'England—made in England!' And he let out a string of words neither Anderson nor me could understand, but which sounded like what verra bad language should.

"Well, I was up and drawin' back my hand to get a swing at him that would hae liftit him into the street, when wee Anderson clung on to my arm cryin', 'Alec man, remember your promise!'

So I put an effort on myself, and did na' hit. But they stoppit the car, and we were put aff it. Just a bit ruffled you understand, but I was na' mindin' much, because I was that proud at no hittin' the man.

"So we did not bother about gettin' on another car, but just went for a stroll in the public gardens, and by the ponds, where the nursery maids were teachin' the infants to throw stones at the tame ducks. We sat down on a seat for a smoke, but having lost our matches, Anderson went forrit to ask a gentlemen wi' a tile-hat who was watchin' the nursemaids. Anderson is no scholar, of course, and as the man was a foreigner he was hard put to it to tell him what he wanted; but he kept on striking the side of his pipe, just as if he had a match, for to show him. The gentleman looked down on Geordie and began to twirl up his moustache.

" 'Englishman?' he asked, and I saw Geordie nod and smile. Then the man gave a snarl like a beast, and spat fair in Anderson's face. Well, it was verra comfortin' to me to see how Anderson's good manners tumbled off him. He was into the big man like a flash, and the collision jumbled off his tile-hat, which fell over the railings, and rolled down the bank into the water. But I did na' see that at the time, it's only an inference, ye ken. I found it there afterwards; for I was makin' towards them when the big man up wi' his stick and laid Anderson oot. He had never seen

me, and he was lifting his foot to kick Geordie where he lay when I got to him."

Duff pushed his cap further back and smiled softly.

"What did you do?" I cried, impatient.

"Do?" he asked. Then he ran up his sleeve and showed me his forearm.

"Look at that!" he cried.

It was worth looking at. Daily labour with a sixteen-foot fire scoop had turned it into steel, and the heat of his stoke-hole had sweated every grain of fat from his whole body.

"The nursemaids screeched and ran; and then the police came up, and they were both put into a cart and taken to the infirmary. He tried to keep me off with his stick, ye ken; but there was a dodge I got off a fellow on one o' Allan's cattle-boats, Montreal to Glesca'—verra rough they are, even for a Broomielaw greaser."

His face glowed.

"It wis on them boats I learned to hit hard and quick. Man, I like to feel my fist come on something hard and solid; it's verra satisfyin'. I cannot say," he continued, "that I had the feelin' wi' that German, for most Germans are fat and soft; it's just like hittin' a bolster. Hit-tin' Yankees is better. But no much," he concluded gloomily, "for though they're hard they're very brittle."

It was then that I understood why Alexander Duff was, in that beer-house of rough men,

allowed to indulge his musical whims, and was accorded, by general consent, a table to himself! I asked him how it was that he escaped arrest. He hesitated a little in his answer.

"Well, ye see," he replied at length, "there wis no one there to notice; so I let them think it was Anderson did it."

"What!" I cried.

A rather sheepish look came over him at the exclamation.

"Ay," he said, "I allow it looks black. But ye see, I thought Geordie wis by wi' it; and as the other was beyond speech, I thought little Geordie should have the credit. They'll both be fined," he added, brightening, "and I'll pay Anderson's. So he'll come out of it no worse in pocket, and far better in glory."

"He'll get over it all right?"

"Oh ay, though he gave me a bit fright when I saw him in his bed in the Infirmary. He says to me, 'Ye'll be gettin' into trouble, Alec, wi' me not there to take care o' ye.' I thought the stick must have touched his intellect then; for how could a wee fellow, the like of him, take care of a big man the like of me. Mind ye I was richt sorry for to leave him there, especially when they gave me what is called his 'effects,' which is the queer name they give to a sailor's duds; and when I get to the boat they'll be askin' where little Geordie Anderson is, and that bundle there is all I have to show for him. That's why I'm

no exactly hurrying back! It's gey sad, is it no? But, man, it wis verra cheerin', when I wis walkin' away wi' Anderson's 'effects,' to see the other fellow lying there gettin' dressed by three doctors, wi' what ye might call my 'effects' on him."

It was then that my patience had its reward! Minutes were precious to me, but Duff's tale had beguiled me. I scarcely heard anything he said after he had pointed to the bundle of clothes that lay on the vacant chair by his side. I scarcely recognised my own voice, as I put the question:

"Are those his clothes?"

Duff laid his hand on them gloomily.

"Ay, are they," he said. "There they are, where poor Geordie ought by rights to have been, and would have been, had we not tried to be decent and genteel, and gone meanderin' in ornamental gardens."

He gathered the bundle to him and straightened his cap, an ominous symptom of immediate departure. The clock had struck eleven.

"Mr. Duff——" I began, "Mr. Duff——" and stopped. Could I venture all on a single throw?

"Well?" said Duff. "That is my name, though it's no verra familiar to me in that form, except in times of Parliamentary elections in the Leith Burghs."

I breathed hard, and took my chance:

"You yourself know what it is to be in trouble

with the police." I watched his face with eagerness.

"Ay, I do! I'll no deny it; but oftener it's the police that knows what it is to be in trouble with me."

"Well," I blurted out and risked all, "the fact is—don't go yet—I'm in trouble with the police myself to-night."

Duff didn't sit down again, but he seemed slightly interested.

"Ay, are ye so? Well, it's a thing verra easy done, in any German port. What wis it—playin' on the organ without a licence?"

I could not guess what special delinquency this figure of speech stood for, nor was there time to ask.

"It is for quite a lot of things," I said. "But among them, I have reason to believe there is aggravated assault on an officer in the execution of his duty, a street riot, knocking out a German agent, rescue of a prisoner, bilking a cabman, and smashing a statue of the Kaiser."

Duff sat down and looked up at me, shaking his head, at first I thought, in incredulity:

"We do not honour our great men enough," he said slowly, "an' that's a fac'."

Imagining he referred to myself, I modestly said that he was overrating my achievements. He waived me aside.

"I was not referring to you," he said, "but to that great man Thomas Carlyle."

"Carlyle!" I cried.

"Ay, just him! Man, it's wonderful to think I've listened from my youth up to what he says about the folly of judgin' man by his clothes, and now do the verra thing he condemns. Ye ken," he continued, "when ye came in I just judged ye by the funny hat ye've on, and the fancy cloak ye're wearin'."

"Oh, that doesn't matter——" I was beginning.

"Ah! but it does," Duff interrupted. "I did ye a great injustice judgin' ye so."

"What did you take me for?"

"Well, the fact is that in them clothes I just took ye for a bluidy organ-grinder!"

"Never mind," I said to him. "I'll forgive you, if you'll do something for me."

"Name it, sir," said Duff.

And then I explained to him that I had come to escape by the *Fenella*, on which I had a friend, but had found the police on the look out for me at the barrier. Would he take a note to my friend which would explain that I was unable to escape by the boat?

Mr. Duff became excited immediately.

"And why can ye no deliver it yersel'?" he asked.

I assured him nothing would be more agreeable to me.

"And why should ye not?" he cried. "There's Geordie's duds here."

He lifted up the bundle. That was all I wanted. It was for many reasons better that the proposal should come from him.

"Is there time?" I asked. "It's the half-hour."

"Plenty," cried Duff, well pleased at having persuaded me, as he thought. "Come on."

As we hurried away towards the dock I told him of the only fear I had. Anderson was a little man; did he think I could get into his clothes? Dungaree was cotton, wasn't it, and would not stretch?

"Havers!" was the reply. "Ye forget Geordie was a sailor, and sailors are not allowed to wear dungaree, which is the uniform of the engineering profession. Sailors wear jerseys, and jerseys will stretch."

"But the trousers!"

Duff stopped and looked at me.

"Do you want to go or not?" he asked. "No doubt they'll be a bit little, still ye may have observed that sailors are just no verra partickeelar about the fit of their trousers, in the merchant service anyway. They'll be a' richt, so lang as ye've no occasion to bend."

Behind the trucks I changed into Anderson's clothes, Duff standing sentry, though there was little need of that as the night was pitch black and the rain still falling. The Professor's coat and hat and my own things we dropped into the dock. Duff was delighted with my appearance.

"Come on noo," he said. "You and me will go bang through like a pair of reciprocating cylinders."

So we pushed forward. There were no signs of any passengers proceeding to the vessel; probably, according to frequent practice, all were aboard early, and already asleep. Ahead of us stretched the long row of lamps that marked the edge of the quay wall, but gave little light by which to walk. Through the squalls of rain there came from the distant boat the noise of hissing steam, and the hurried rattle of the derrick, busy lifting in the heavy goods.

"Dod," said Duff at length, "it'll no do to slink up like this, as if we were afraid. We'll just have to tune up, and give them notice of what to expect."

There was good sense in this suggestion; it would prepare their minds before they saw us, to believe us to be what we pretended, and we should get the readier entrance. Duff chose the song, and I joined in.

"Oh ye'll tak' the high road,
And I'll tak' the low road,
And I'll be in Scotland afore ye."

"Just jolly," Duff warned me. "Not too drunken-like."

And so we went on, arm in arm, stressing all the unimportant syllables, and holding on the final notes of each line to a grotesque length, as is the manner of street vocalists.

I dreaded the barrier horribly.

There was not the slightest difficulty made in passing us! Duff, it seemed, was a character very well known to the official usually in charge. I heard him say something to the others as we came up. For all that, there was one ghastly moment, which was when a brief scrutiny was made of our faces with the help of an uplifted lantern. I blinked foolishly into the lantern, whistling the song, for whistling does cause distortion of features. The lantern was lowered, a grunt came from behind it, and we were passed through!

I heaved a deep sigh of relief. Duff squeezed my arm mightily.

"Sing, ye daft goat," he whispered. "Sing on. Ye'll make them suspeecious if ye drop it like that," and we both resumed our interrupted song.

"I'll be in Scotland afore ye—
Before ye, be—fore ye."

Duff roared it out.

"And I'll be in Scotland be—fore ye,"

I shouted back. And most devoutly did I hope it!

When we got round the corner of the sheds and offices, there lay the *Fenella*, with the gangway steeply reaching up her side, and lights hurrying to and fro in the last haste of immediate departure. Once we were on board I

was very anxious to find out whether Miss Thompson was also there. I told Duff, and he said it would be easy to get a steward to look at the passenger list to see if my sweetheart was aboard. And I had to tell him that her name would not be entered in the list, and also that the lady was not my sweetheart.

"Well — awell," he said imperturbably, "don't get so heated. I just wanted to find out."

He conducted me to the safety of the stoke-hole, to reach which we descended innumerable iron-runged ladders, amid smells of oil and hot metal. Down there I felt in perfect security against all search. Duff introduced me to some of his mates as one who had to flee the country because he had clouted a bobby and bowled over Billy the Kayser.

"A master-piece that," he remarked. "He'll tell ye all about it afore we see the Bass."

We were well into the Firth of Forth before I again came on deck. It was, however, a fairly easy time I had down there in the bowels of the vessel, free from observation, shielded and fed by the firemen for the sake of Alexander Duff. The same Duff was able, through a steward, to set my mind at rest about Miss Thompson; and it was one of the many kindnesses he showed me for which I was most grateful. He saw my early uneasiness, guessed at its cause, and obtained the information by some lie or other,

without telling me what he was about, and then broke the welcome news in characteristic fashion. He would persist in calling her my sweetheart.

"Ay," he said suddenly, apropos of nothing, "about that Miss Johnston?"

"What Miss Johnston?"

"Johnston—that's your sweetheart's name, isn't it, or is it Thompson? I'm no verra good at distinguishing niceties o' sound which are so near to each other."

That was true enough, as anyone would understand who had ever heard him sing, but I was too startled to tell him so then.

"What about her?"

"Man, man, ye need na' just roar at me. The fact is I asked Long Willie if he had gotten her aboard, and he said he had one of that description."

"You never saw her, so how could you describe her?"

"I describit her by her name, of course," answered Duff.

"What name did you use, Johnston or Thompson?"

He scratched his head in a sham perplexity.

"Deed, I'm no richtly sure," he answered, grinning with his black face. And then seeing I was really vexed, relented: "It's a' richt; I was only jokin'. The lassie's up there above your head, safe and sound."

When we ran into the pier o' Leith, and there was the usual great anxiety among the passengers to be the first ashore, I made my way up the iron-runged ladders and on to the deck. Soon I discovered Miss Thompson sitting by herself, waiting patiently, clear of the struggle. She did not recognise me as I sat down beside her, and stared in alarm at my grin. It was then I saw there were tears in her eyes, which astonished me, since she was coming home, and not leaving. Suddenly she recognised me, and out went her hand on my breast, and she just staring and never saying a word. It was curious, for I just looked back, and said nothing either, which was not at all as I had pictured the thing beforehand. But I very soon got up: it was the height of unwisdom to draw attention to the queer fact that here was a stoker on friendly terms with a first-class passenger. And of course I still had to get ashore—as unobtrusively as possible. So I lifted the young lady's bag, as if to carry it down the gangway for a sixpence, as so many of the stewards and crew were doing at that moment.

On approaching the gangway, however, where the purser stood taking the tickets, that proud official sternly waved me away.

"Stand back there," he boomed at me. "Stokers are not allowed to handle passengers' luggage."

No doubt he took me for a new hand, and

the small official everywhere dearly loves to make a public display of his authority. I was nettled perhaps also at the failure of my scheme for getting ashore, which threatened now to draw attention to me, rather than to cloak me from it. This made me rash.

"Who are you calling a stoker?" I asked.

I was glad my friend Duff could not hear. The man glared at me.

"You," he cried. "And none of your lip! Drop that bag and get forward!"

I nodded my coal-grimed face at him.

"Look here, my man," I said coldly, "I'll have you to know that you are addressing a first-class passenger." The tone of my voice puzzled him, and he gaped a bit; but (oh, Thomas Carlyle!) the clothes carried conviction, and he sneered out:

"A first-class passenger, are you? In that case, you'll doubtless be able to show me a first-class ticket?"

The brute glanced for approval of his wit to the gold-braided, white-capped, smaller edition of himself who stood on the other side of the gangway in the person of the boy clerk; and that young sycophant did not fail with his titter. Miss Thompson stepped past me holding out the ticket.

"Here it is," she said simply.

The man's jaw dropped; but with the eye of his subordinate on him he rallied.

"Ay, so it is, ay! But where is your own, Madam?"

She put the other ticket into his amazed hand without a word, and I followed her down the gangway. Glancing back, I saw that the two officials were looking from us to each other, and from each other to us. At the time, I thought this incident merely amusing, and wondered how that purser would explain the affair to himself and his friends.

A couple of hours afterwards I met Miss Thompson at the Edinburgh British Hotel. The interval I had employed in providing myself, by the help of a loan from her, with some new clothes. A long overdue visit to the barber also helped to restore me to my normal appearance. And in passing the post-office I took the opportunity to enter and wire home the news of my arrival. Of course I was not going home at once. Now that I knew the political importance of the papers I carried it was my intention to see the girl safely on to the St. Andrews train, and then catch the afternoon express for King's Cross, to lay the papers before the authorities at the Whitehall Office. I was feeling easy in my mind, and modestly satisfied with my achievements. The sense of being perpetually pursued, the feelings of unrest and suspicion, dropped from me on that fine morning, as I sauntered along Princes Street, to pass the time that yet remained before I was due at the hotel.

Miss Thompson was already waiting for me in the lounge, busy with a time-table. Over our food we discussed plans, and I told her of my adventures with Alexander Duff, and of the manner in which he got through the guard set on the boat. She told me she had never expected to see me again, as it was known on the ship that there was a hunt after a man who might attempt to escape on the *Fenella*, and that not only Hamburg but every exit from Germany had that morning been warned by the Berlin police.

"How old are you?" she asked me abruptly, as was sometimes her way.

"Twenty-seven," I answered.

"Do you know, I am looking at you for the first time!"

I hadn't thought of it. Up to this hour she had not seen me but as an unshaven, dirty, ragged and hunted creature.

"Well," I said, "how do you find me—better or worse?"

My tone was light; but she did not repeat it.

"Oh, I don't know," she said. "You are different, that is all."

But it was not all; and I had the impression that this strange girl did not like me to be different; that somehow she preferred the unkempt wastrel to the clean, assured man, now opposite her. Women are strange creatures; the best of them seem to like us best when they can help us most. And the girl sitting there, making a mere

pretence of eating, and hardly glancing my way, though we were so soon to part, gave me a curious chill as I reflected on the change—her bravery, eagerness, and even tenderness for me, in the hour of danger; her complete indifference to me, now, in the hour of safety!

I had, however, something that would lift her out of that calm aloofness.

"There's that packet," I said casually, when we had finished.

"Well, have you lost it?"

"No fear!" I answered. "I have risked too much to keep it."

"That's all right then," she said, fiddling with some crumbs.

And I'll be hanged if she didn't repress a yawn!

"Don't you want to see it?" I cried, amazed, as I remembered how eager she had been.

She shrugged her shoulders.

"If you like."

If I liked! I couldn't make this out. It almost shocked me. However, I thought to myself, as I led the way over to a vacant table that looked down on the bridge and the roofs of the station beneath, a sight of that mysterious paper will soon alter things. For I had made what seemed to me to be a mighty safe deduction—that documents to regain possession of which every port and railway of Germany had been guarded ought to be of some significance.

We sat down at the table and I drew out the American cloth packet, and opened it; myself eager, she, apparently unconcerned.

My heavens, it *was* a surprise! I may say I was ready to find anything in that packet from German State secrets to American gilt-edged securities, from a drawing of the latest French discovery in the science of artillery to a scheme for the invasion of England. But that!

I must have presented a ludicrous spectacle of amazed disappointment as I looked up from the neatly drawn and crudely coloured figures that sprawled over the paper. They were childish drawings of beasts and birds and toys, and on the paper was inscribed in an unformed hand:

"Drawn by Little Eitel, for his dear Papa's Birthday—August, 1914."

I looked at Miss Thompson. Her indifference was certainly gone. But it was replaced by an expression more intolerable—amusement. And drawn our way, I suppose, by the expression of amazement and chagrin on my face, a waiter sauntered, napkin under arm, behind us. Ashamed lest he should see the childish thing that engaged my attention, I hastily drew the black cover over it, saying to him, and in my confusion saying it in German:

"What do you want?"

"The newspaper, sir," he said smoothly, in the same language, picking up the *Scotsman* from the window seat.

But was that all he wanted? It seemed to me that, even as he answered, his bilious eyes looked curiously at the black cover of Henschel's packet. As for Miss Thompson, she was frankly laughing.

I almost loathed her.

CHAPTER VII

THE London train, when it left that afternoon, left without me. I draw a veil over that part of my journey home which was made in the company of Miss Margarita Thompson. It was full of constraint on my part, and as for her, she made many attempts, for which I hated her, to be kind. Perhaps you can imagine the fool I felt—all these alarms and excursions and accompanying mysteries, for what? A little boy's drawings for his dear Papa's birthday! Miss Thompson never once referred to that accursed paper during the journey, nor did I, you may be sure; but this very silence was eloquent. The one thing I had to be thankful for was the opening of the thing before I had taken the train to London: it was, at least, some comfort that I had not rushed into the Whitehall Office.

When, at last, the train drew up at the junction for St. Andrews, and the girl had to change, I am afraid the word of thanks that I made myself address to her were more cold and formal than I could have wished. She had been more than kind,

but I had not understood her lately, and though the memory of her goodness to me almost made me forget, for the moment, yet, when at the last I held her hand to say good-bye, I saw her lips tremble at the corners, and knew that she found it hard to restrain a smile. I could not, of course, deny that the affair had its amusing side to others; but when the big express moved on and she, standing clear of the baggage and passengers, waved me farewell, I was glad of every roll of the wheels that left her, a little rapidly diminishing figure on the platform.

In the history of the human race there have been, indeed, scattered examples of individual old men temporarily become ridiculous in the eyes of their brothers, who yet did not find the experience insupportable; but the young man has never existed, who, suddenly and incontestably fallen from the heroic to the ridiculous in a woman's eyes, would not find it preferable to be dead. It is, of course, a great thing to be alive. I am increasingly aware of that. I perceive, too, that the fewer the years of life men have left them, the fewer become the things for which they would willingly die; but at twenty-seven the catalogue is still relatively extensive, and perhaps Ridiculous to Woman is the last item to go.

It is hard to say why I didn't burn that paper when I got to my room that night. And anyway there was no fire. I tossed it into the empty grate.

In the succeeding days it was a source of un-failing delight to me to visit all the places and things in the garden and woods which had associations with my boyhood.

This house, which had been my mother's home ever since my father's death, stood on the foothills of the Grampians, and four miles from the railway station, near which also ran the great North Road from Perth to Aberdeen. The village lay on the road to the station, a little more than a mile distant, and our house stood on a side road which traversed the glen beyond us, and crossed the Grampians into Deeside. The house itself was about a hundred and fifty yards from the road, facing south, with a little garden in front that sloped down to the fields, and it seemed to seek shelter against the wild north-west winds, so close did it stand to the big wood at the back. It was a wild and lonely country-side, very pleasant in summer, but in winter—and winters in the Grampians were long—eerie to a degree. Then, when darkness began to fall at about four in the afternoon and the frost stiffened the snow on the ground so that it "crunched" to one's tread at every step, to come on that house with its dark and mysterious background of larches and firs, was to receive an impression of remoteness and silence that lingered long in the memory.

Of wild life there was, of course, an abundance; and when one's remembrances stirred about that old place, it was not so much by people, of whom

there were few, as by the wild things of the forest and moor: black crows in slow flight in the gathering dusk over snow, the young deer, no bigger than a sheep dog, that came without fear about the garden in the early spring, the rabbits loping out of the wood in sunny evenings, the hen-pheasant with her speckled brood, the monotonous note of the wood-doves, of which one never tired, the squirrels that chased each other with incredible agility, chattering with mirth—these, and not people, are what one remembers best.

It was to this life I returned, after, as I thought, the very unpleasant chapter in my experiences, just recorded, had been closed for ever. And the old place at once stirred in me a zest for old and half-forgotten things. When I was a boy there were times when I looked outward and away from the place, to the great world that lay beyond, the world of romance and strange adventures, of which I had read in books, but never seen, the tremendous cities, the soldiers that marched behind brass bands, going to the wars, the tall ships, and sailors with gold-ringed ears and swarthy faces, who came from foreign countries. But now, I felt that while the wide world was still curious, for a while, I could find my own home and country-side glorious enough.

My mother would have liked nothing better than to see me settle down as a general medical practitioner in some quiet place, driving my own

Ford car, and familiar with the names of every cottage bairn in the parish. Don't imagine for a moment that I am sneering. The country has no class of professional man more worthy of honour than that of the medical profession, men who are kindly and tolerant invariably, which the ministers are sometimes not, often, like the minister, underpaid but seldom over-valued. But the glamour that belongs to the specialist's side of the profession was too strong for me to resist. I told her this one day when I was helping her in the garden. Perhaps she was a little disappointed, but she made no remark, and I made haste to change the subject.

"I see you have 'wired' the garden," I said.

"Yes," she said, going on with her work. "That is for the rabbits; they eat up everything."

"Will it be any good? I saw old Peter Milne, the forester, yesterday, and he swears that the rabbits are learning to climb."

"Nonsense!" she said.

"He says it's true. They sunk the netting round a nursery of young trees, so as to stop them burrowing under, and yet the damage still went on, and they could not understand it till they set a snare, for a joke, on the top of a gate. The next day they had a rabbit in it."

"Humph!" she remarked. "In your long absence you have forgotten old Peter's reputation."

It was great fun, too, to roam the old unforgotten ways through the mighty woods. Such strangers as did come to our part of the country were generally people interested in forestry, for ours was one of the few places in which forestry was treated as a science; indeed several of the foresters had been to Bavaria to study German methods. It was one of Peter Milne's tragedies, perhaps the greatest, that he had been thought too old to go. What a fund of material he would have gathered for his favourite occupation, which, after all, was not forestry but romance. The old man, however, unlike myself, was wise enough to find it in his daily work, in the lonely woods where he had been all his life.

I had been little more than a week at home, and was in a fair way towards forgetting the late romantic adventures that had ended so ludicrously at that table in the Edinburgh hotel, when I was startled by an incident that occurred, an incident that brought back into my newly ordered and serene life that element of the mysterious, of which I had lately had more than enough. One day, having hunted out an old trout-rod to try my hand at the old sport, and the burn being very low on account of the long spell of fine weather, I had gone away up the glen and fished the whole day beside a little loch. The thing happened as I was coming home. But for the proper understanding of what happened you must understand something of the configuration of the

glen through which I travelled. Both sides of the glen, which at its widest was never more than two hundred yards, were covered with thickly planted woods. The road ran along the south side, and the burn usually kept to the north, but twice diverged and cut across the road, and at these two places there were bridges, but for foot-passengers only.

It was a calm still evening, one of the first with a sunset since my return, when I set out to walk the three miles of the glen that lay between the little loch and my home. I was pleasantly tired with my long day, but the road took its way through a lovely country, and I made good going, while the sun, low down on the hills behind, made my shadow, grotesquely elongated, take giant strides on the road ahead.

I met no one; but once, away in the left among the trees, I heard the reverberant crack of a gun that spoke of a gamekeeper on his rounds.

When, however, I approached the first of the two foot-bridges that span the burn at the point where the glen narrows and forces the water to take a loop across the road I became aware of a man who stood on the narrow rustic bridge and looked down on the burn. He appeared to be a pedlar, for a yellow tin box, to which a leather strap was attached, lay on the ground at his feet. Now it was a rare thing to see any of his kind on that road, for, as I have said, ours was a remote place that lay far from the main roads, and the

population was sparse. Tramps and hawkers were quite unfamiliar figures, for this road ran over miles of moor and mountain; and so as I came up to the pedlar I was prepared to warn him that for the next twenty miles he would find none to whom he might sell his wares save grouse, and the wild deer in Glen Dye.

He was a short slight man, spare of flesh, but, as the police put it on certain grim occasions, apparently well nourished.

Raising himself from his leaning posture against the rail of the bridge as I approached, and facing me, he took off his hat. The salute was not unusual in itself, but it was perhaps just a trifle more courtly in execution than was within the powers, even when it was within the will, of any of our northern gentry of the road. The fellow bowed too in ingratiating fashion.

"Can you tell me, sir, if I am on the road to Aberdeen?"

Hearing him speak I understood his fine manners: the man was a foreigner, for though his English was good it had that suggestion of a trip or halt in it that is the last barrier to a perfect enunciation. I stopped, grounding the butt of my rod and smiling at his question. He responded, smiling himself very pleasantly.

"You must have left the road to Aberdeen five miles back," I said.

He threw up his hands in a gesture of dismay—they were thin hands, and very unclean.

"*Ach!*" he said plaintively. "It is the language."

"You are not English?" I asked.

"Ah no! I am Polish, from Warsaw, where I was student at the University once. Got into trouble"—here he leered atrociously—"go to Libau and find little British grain steamer. I have been nine months in Lanark, working in the coal-pit."

It rolled off like a lesson learnt, and left me with the feeling that the man was lying, though for what purpose I could not imagine. Looking at the hands which, he said, had worked for nine months in a coal-pit, and remembering the hands of Alec Duff and his mates, the man's story seemed to me pure impudence. They were dirty enough, certainly, but smooth and unroughened; and the dirt was of another quality.

"What do you want in Aberdeen?" I asked.

"Well," he replied, "my leetle trouble in Warsaw, it blow over; and I expect to get a little ship, a fishing ship to Riga, before the storms of winter come."

I sprang a question on him suddenly, in German:

"Are you afraid of the sea?"

There seemed to come a flicker of light, a little spark, into his eyes, that died away as soon as it came, and was replaced by an appearance of thoughtfulness.

"That is German, is it not? I do not understand. I am a Russian Pole, from Estopol, east of Warsaw."

He smiled as if something had pleased him, as a man smiles sometimes at his own lie, when the deception is either so gross a thing as not to be hid or when he does not care to hide it further. There was something reptilian about the creature.

Reshouldering my rod I prepared to move on.

"Look here, my man," I said, "I asked you if you were afraid of the sea. I have no idea why you should lie about it, but I fancy you have more German than I have."

He grinned at me.

"The Engleesh, they think every one is afraid of the sea but themselves."

I passed on taking no more heed. As the distance between us increased, so did the fellow's venom increase.

"The Engleesh!" he shouted. "You spik of the sea as if it were your property; but soon you will onderstand. You have been feeshing to-day? Yais! You have been feeshing in troubled waters before to-day, and I will show you what comes of it, I! Behold."

This made me pause and look back. I marvelled at the man's hate, all, apparently, roused by my innocent question as to the sea. He had picked up his yellow box and was dancing with rage, his feet making a great noise on the wooden

flooring of the foot-bridge. It was a strange spectacle in that lonely glen, flooded with the soft light of evening.

"Dr. Abercromby!" he shouted. "Dr. Abercromby!"

There was something formal in his manner of crying my name that caught my ear. He was facing me with his yellow box in his two hands. Looking at him I saw what he did not, the figure of a man coming up the road beyond; and it did not need the game-bag and the gun to tell me that it was Forsyth, the gamekeeper—the long, loping stride was sufficient. The pedlar's voice rent the air as he clutched his box, as if to hurl it at me over the hundred yards between us:

"I vill show you what comes of feeshing. I vill send your soul to feesh in Hell!" and he dashed his box with a loud bang on the ground.

I think I must have been in the act of opening my mouth to laugh, when, almost simultaneously with the crash of the box on the wooden bridge, there came from the wood alongside me, a sudden *crack! crack! crack!* At the first my cap was lifted clean off my head as by a sudden wind; with the second, a spear of red-hot iron passed across the back of my neck, and at the third my rod jerked itself from my grasp, became suddenly alive like a serpent, and took a dive into my side. I must have thrown up my hands and fallen backwards in a heap, collapsing into the shallow ditch at the side of the road,

among the burdocks and thistles. Then darkness fell.

When I came to myself Forsyth was bending over me, and old Peter Milne, the forester, knelt at my head, on one knee, with his hat full of water. I felt horribly sick and weak.

"He's coming round, Peter," Forsyth was saying. "But, man, it was an awfu' narrow thing that."

"Ay," said Peter. "If ye had na' let off your gun, and if I had na' shouted in the plantation behind the blackgaird's back, it's a funeral we'd have had on Friday."

Then I must have gone off again, for when I came round they were examining the back of my neck.

"An eighth of an inch more, and he'd have been by wi' it."

"Do you think maybe the sinews are cut?" asked Peter. "I mind me of a chap that was here before you, Wullie. He had a bit accident that cut the sinews of his neck, and when he got better his neck was set stiff, looking up to the sky."

To this Forsyth seemed to give no heed, going on laving my head with the cool water.

"It's a fac' I'm tellin' you," said Peter. "He was na' here long, for, as the laird said, he micht ha' done for pheasants and grouse, but he was no use for the rabbits and hares and whittericks or anythin' that does na' fly."

"Wheesht, man," said the gamekeeper.

With considerable pain I was able to raise myself a little.

"The pedlar with the yellow box," I gasped.

"Och! he's all right," said Forsyth. "I took him in my stride and stamped on him. Now drink this." And he held Peter's old hat to my lips!

"Did you catch him?" I asked.

"Ay," said Forsyth. "I just caught him on the side of his head, as I passed, and knockit the little screechin' devil over the brig."

"He's there yet," Peter chimed in. "I hauled him oot o' the water when I went to fill my hat; and he's lyin' on the side, gaspin' like a fish."

"Do you think you could walk, sir?" the gamekeeper asked encouragingly.

Peter suggested that a gate might be taken off its hinges to carry me. This was all the stimulation I needed. Nothing would have pleased Peter better than to have officiated in such a procession. I was still dazed, but did not seem to have received any serious damage.

"How did it all happen?" I asked.

"Deed, sir," Forsyth remarked grimly, "that's just what Peter and me are waitin' to ask you. All I know is I saw that little devil on the brig dancin' a jig—a kind of Glesca' Jew I'm thinkin'—and you standin' watchin'. Then he

clashed down his bit box, and that was a signal, for on the nick there came three shots from the trees near ye; then I started runnin'."

"Ay," said Peter, taking up the tale, "I heard the shots when I was up by in the wood. So I came crashin' through the young Douglas firs, so as not to miss the sport"—Peter was quite unconscious of the grimness of that—"and I heard the fellow that fired go tearin' through the undergrowth. I never saw him. It could na' well have been an accident, could it?"

"It was no accident," said Forsyth, picking up his gun.

"A great stir it'll make in the papers," said Milne. "The police will be oot from Steenhive whenever we report it." He smacked his lips over the prospect. "It'll make a great eclaw in the county."

Now any *éclat* was the last thing I desired. It was amazing to me to think that the affair of the Henschel papers was not yet finished, and that this hate of me should carry them to such lengths. It was like childish rage, spiteful but irrational. I could not understand it. Surely, long ago, they must have discovered that I had myself been fooled in risking my life for that infantile drawing. Had they jeered and laughed at me, I could have understood. Supposing this affair came out in public, there was not only my mother to think of, the whole miserable adventures connected with little Eitel's drawings for his

dear Papa's birthday would have to become known! Not if I could help it!

"Perhaps it was an accident," I said at length.

"It was nae accident thon," Forsyth asserted. "The man that fired the shot meant to have your life."

"Would you swear to that in a Court of Justice, Forsyth?" I asked him.

The gamekeeper stroked his chin consideringly.

"I would not," he said. "But it's what I think."

"Just so," I answered. "Now I'll tell you what I think. The shot was fired by a cyclist. Many cyclists carry guns for fear of tramps; and this one had just gone into the wood to try his weapon."

Forsyth eyed me queerly and said nothing. It was Peter who spoke:

"Well, well, I'll just go down and bring up that little fellow in the water, and we'll see what he says to it all."

When he had gone, the gamekeeper spoke up:

"Mr. Abercromby, I ken fine there's more in this affair than meets the eye; but, if you don't want any scandal about it, you've only to say the word."

"Forsyth," I said, knowing he was to be trusted, "I'll be open with you. There is a lot behind this. Later I may tell you about it, for I think you are a brave man, and I may need the

help of a brave man, should you be disposed to offer it. But say nothing to Peter Milne."

He nodded.

"That's all right then: the thing's as close with me as a kirk door on week-days."

"Do you think Milne will go spreading sensational stories?" I asked rather anxiously.

"That's what I'm sure he will do," said the gamekeeper. "But, if he does, what's his word against mine, when everybody knows old Peter Milne for the biggest leear in Kincardineshire. It's no a verra likely story for a man o' his reputation to find credit for."

We saw Peter coming back alone, and knew that the man with the yellow box was either escaped or dead. He was carrying something, however.

"Losh, the man's gone!" he cried to us. "No a trace of him left, except this." And he came forward with a lot of pedlar's goods: a handful of boot laces, clothes-brushes, cheap scissors, a tooth-brush, and such-like. "They were swimmin' round and round in the pool below the brig," he said. "I'm thinkin' they must ha' tummilt oot o' his box." He began to wipe the scissors. "I'll be keepin' them for maself, as a sort of souveneer."

"And the rest too," I said. "Finders are keepers."

"Hoot no!" he said, pleased. "What would I do wi' a clothes-brush, I that only brush

my breeks for funerals, ye ken; and ye ken it's verra seldom we have one now."

The regretful tone with which he concluded gave me a cold chill.

"Take ye the clothes-brush, sir," he went on, "as a memorial of your narra escape. Ay, and Forsyth can have this funny wee brush, as a souveneer of the clout he gave the tinker."

The gamekeeper put the tooth-brush in his pocket.

"Ay," he remarked, "I'll take it; it'll be verra useful to me for cleaning the lock o' my gun."

Above everything else now, I wanted to get home and have a long meditation over the event that had happened. Having fixed up the gamekeeper there was nothing to fear from Peter Milne's talk. Talk he could. But I knew that when people went to Forsyth for corroboration they would get none; and so Peter's true story would merely add to his reputation for romancing. Both men accompanied me on the way, for I had no fancy to be left alone, and perhaps be potted at from among the trees again.

But when I got home ultimately I found something which soon gave me other food for thought. I had been wondering how I could slip unnoticed to my room. As a matter of fact, there was small need to trouble on the point. The house was in a state of great excitement, my mother so full of her own news as to have no

eyes for my condition. She met me at the door, the village constable behind her.

"Hugh, did you have any money or valuables in your room?"

"Why," I cried, "what's the matter—something happened?" prepared to be glad something had happened.

"Burglar, *or* burglars," said the constable impressively.

"We sent all up and down the burn, looking for you," said my mother.

My room was in a state of complete disorder, the place littered with the contents of the drawers, the mattress and the pillows cut open and their insides scattered everywhere. Books lay all about. The backs had even been removed from the pictures; and the total debris made a huge pile upon the floor. I sat down on the edge of my devastated bed. The policeman, notebook in hand, took advantage of my speechless condition.

"I would like fine to get a list of the missing articles, Mr. Abercromby, so's I'd repor-rt to the sair-rgent," he said.

This I ignored.

"Tell me what happened?" I said to my mother.

But the officer was not to be done out of the full glory of such an occasion, the first time, I suppose, he had come face to face with *crime* in the whole course of his innocent career as a rural policeman.

"Maybe, sir," he remarked, "it would be better if I read over to you my offeecial report here."

He thumbed over his oblong notebook and began:

"Tuesday, 21st July.—Called to Drumock House by messenger at 3.21 p.m. On arrival was met by the lady of the house, Mrs. Abercromby, who informed me that a burglarious entry had been made, and various articles (list enclosed) removed. The circumstances as the aforementioned lady stated them was, that, about ten o'clock a man called at the house inquiring for Dr. Abercromby, son of the aforesaid, but he was out. This man, who was 24, dark eyes and beard, and generally of foreign Italian appearance, hereupon informed Mrs. A. that he was in the employment of an Aberdeen house decorating firm who had received instructions from the doctor to call and estimate for certain structural alterations and decorations to his rooms. Mrs. A., never having heard of nor agreed to the same, was for refusing admission, being somewhat hot about it, but the man was pressing, saying that he had a train to catch, and that he was only for measuring the doctor's room that day. So he was admitted to the rooms and Mrs. A. left the house to go in search for the doctor. She was absent over an hour, and on her return the man was gone. Christina MacKellar, aged 42 and 5 months, serving-maid to the above, deposes

that she heard no undue noise in the interim, and that the Italian departed in a great hurry. Did not observe what goods he carried with him."

He snapped his book.

"That's as far as I've got, and I think we'd best now begin the inventory."

"I wish," said my mother, "you would score that out about my being displeased—in the circumstances."

The constable waved his hand.

"A verra natural feelin' it was, mem," he said. "I am afeered it must stand. Forbye, it's Christina MacKellar's evidence, and it does na' do to tamper wi' offeecial documents."

My mother turned on the damsel who stood at the door, flushing, both horrified and angry, to see her harmless backdoor gossip about the mistress thus chronicled in an official document.

"Never heed him, mem, it's only Tammy Bruce, though he talks as if he was the Lord High Justice. I'll see his wife the night, and you'll see if she does na' make him write down just what you would like said. Him wi' his Christina MacKellar this and that!—him that's never given me but Kirsty since I was at the school wi' his wife, and he a post office laddie, fleein' aboot on a red bicycle."

The brutal directness of this attack took the official breath away.

"Now, now!" he said; but the effort at dignity was pale and spiritless.

Meanwhile I sat linking up things in my mind. The murderous attack in the glen was not the merely spiteful act of revenge over which I had marvelled; it was connected with the search that had been made in my room. They were still after Henschel's paper then! It was extraordinary. Were they quite unaware of the valuelessness of that paper? Why, I did not myself know where it was now! I had thrown it into the fire-place on the night of my arrival. Then, a sudden small gleam of light broke over my understanding—a suspicion that moved swiftly into certainty. Why should I *assume* that the paper was worthless, merely because of its surface appearance of childishness? Others, who knew more of it than did I, did not think it worthless. I forgot where I was, and flared up.

"Oh, fool, fool, fool!" I cried.

"Hugh!" said my mother reprovingly. And I saw that I had been addressing the already crestfallen constable. When, however, I explained that I had been merely speaking of myself, he cleared up, feeling, I suppose, that he was in good company, after Kirsty MacKellar's attack. I turned to that masterful creature.

"Did you see anything of a pedlar with a yellow box?"

"A pedlar!" said she.

"Yes, a pedlar with a yellow box."

"Ay," she said. "There was a man wi' a yellow box sellin' things."

"You talked to him?"

"No more than ordinary."

"When was it?"

"About eleven, or maybe twelve."

"That is when the other man was in the house?"

"Exactly," said Kirsty.

The officer coughed and cleared his throat.

"So," he said, "while the pedlar with the box held you in talk at the backdoor, the Italian had the full run of the house, eh? That is very strange conduct, very strange!"

Kirsty was flustered, and had nothing to say.

This gave me the chance of getting rid of them, for there was a thing that I was anxious to find out above everything else. I had been trying to remember whether a fire had been lit in my room since I came home, and I could not.

A fire had been laid since I came home, but had one been lighted?

"Well," I said to them, "just talk this over in the kitchen, will you?"

They left me, and in a second I was on my knees before the grate. Piece by piece I removed the coals. No, it had not been lighted! Crumpled and dirtied indeed, but intact, there was little Eitel's drawing for his dear Papa's birthday.

It was nine o'clock then. By 9.45 I sent a note asking Forsyth to come and see me at once. It was what I was able to read in that paper, in the three-quarters of an hour, that made me ask him to bring his gun.

CHAPTER VIII

ANY one looking at the drawings by the ostensible infant Eitel would almost certainly take the thing at its surface value. If such a one happened to be a father himself he might perhaps look at the drawing a little longer than any one else, but no one would really examine the thing seriously. And yet I had not sat down, to study the thing from the right angle, for more than half an hour before I saw sinister significance in that apparently childish document.

The new angle, of course, I gained from my knowledge of the anxiety of these men to repossess it. Without at first reading all its secrets, it cost me much trouble and many dangers before the whole riddle was unravelled, I saw this much almost at once—that it portended great danger to the British Empire. And yet it is curious to reflect that I was first put on the secret by a characteristically German flourish, by a detail that was unessential to the plan.

The whole paper is, indeed, characteristic of the German mind in its mixture of childishness

and cunning. For the German is childish in many ways: he is like a bad boy, not only in his love of destruction for its own sake, but also for his irrepressible boastfulness. It would be nothing to educe examples of these two bad qualities from the writings of Prussian soldiers such as Bernhardt, one expects that sort of thing from them; but when one finds the same spirit running through the words of grave philosophic historians like Treitschke, one sees the thing is inherent in the race.

Now, it was something needlessly boastful in the drawing that was my first clue. Indeed, it is so obvious as scarcely to require indication. Let any one look at the figures of the bleeding heart and the dead lion. These two symbols stand for a hundred things that were being said by Germany about England. And if little Eitel, whoever he was, in his derision inserted tame sheep as guardians of the heart, well, there are those who are not German at all who now think his action had plenty of justification, and was no libel on certain people whom we need not here mention.

Well, the first thing I noted was this element of boastfulness, boastful, for, as I now know, it was quite unessential to the information contained in the drawing. An almost daily reference in newspapers and in music-halls to the "heart of the Empire" showed me that it was a symbol for London. Just as clearly as if stated in words, though it will be observed that the drawing bears

no explanatory letter-press, save in its designedly misleading suggestion as to its author and destination, one could see that it was a London attacked from several directions. Notice, too, the significance of the church standing half-way up the hill. The spire carries the usual vane, but there is something singular about that vane—the marks of direction are not set in the customary N.E.W.S. Obviously this departure from the usual is designed, and so these seemed to me to indicate the direction from which the attacks were to come. And it was certainly not difficult to tell from whom the attack was to come: that spirit of boastfulness, which is, it seems, ineradicable, made it impossible to keep out the black German eagle that hovers above the heart.

It was at this point that I sent for Forsyth and his gun. I knew that my pursuers counted on my yet having the paper. They would know that I had opened and examined it by this time; but reckoned on my individual stupidity as, not without justification from some high quarters, they would have reckoned on our racial stupidity, to keep me from penetrating its secret. So far that was plain sailing. But they would reason, that even if that were so, the secret would not be so safe as to make it needless for them to regain possession. Would I not be most likely, seeing its apparent worthlessness, to destroy it? Here I think their reasoning was acute. No! I would not destroy it, for the English have a national

passion for collecting curios, and for showing them. I would, therefore, retain the thing in order to exhibit it as a curiosity, and it *might* be that I might show it and tell the story of how I had acquired it; and there might be a man there who was no fool, and to whom the riddle would speak. And after all there were, doubtless, reasons which I could not guess at that made recovery imperative to them.

I saw the imminence of the danger to which, that night, I stood exposed. For I recognised that some time in the dark hours they would come back in force. This lonely house with its surrounding woods invited attack. It was, perhaps, too, their last chance.

The police officer put his head into the room to announce the conclusion of his interview with Kirsty MacKellar.

"I've taken a note about what Christina MacKellar says—about yon man with the yellow box, sir," he said.

I noted the reversion to the official full name, and inferred that he had got the better of Kirsty in the interview.

"Very good," I answered.

"It's gettin' verra late," he went on. "And I'm awa' to my bed; but I was thinkin' of seein' again into it in the mornin'."

"Right, Mr. Bruce!" I replied. "Come and see me again in the morning."

"Verra good, sir," the functionary nodded.

"I find it's a verra wise thing to sleep on a problem. We must na' be rash. Somethin' may turn up afore mornin'."

Something did turn up before morning! It would be passing strange if something did not—but it would be a matter in which P.C. Bruce would be far beyond his depths. I had no intention of dragging this honest-minded simple constable into it. Still, as I wished him good night, I could not resist a question. I asked him if he had any night duty. He stared at me, bewildered.

"Night duty!" he cried. "When a' body is in their beds by ten o'clock. What would I do stravaigin' the street after that; it would be a breach of the peace in itsel'."

After I had made a round of the house and seen to all the fastenings, I sent Kirsty and my mother to bed, and sat down to wait for Forsyth. Had there been time I would have taken my mother and the servant to the village inn, and gone on to the railway station to catch the London train, but it was now much too late to think of that. Not only was there no train available, but even had there been I could not think of endangering the lives of women on that road between us and the village.

Forsyth brought two dogs with him, a little Aberdeen and a big lurcher. It was quite dark now under the trees, and once they were inside I was glad to bolt the door. I let Forsyth into

something of the story, telling him of the paper that had come by accident into my possession, and that I must hand it over to the Government. That, with the mention of the fact that the men who were trying to take it from me were foreigners, was quite enough for Forsyth, for, as he explained himself, he had a "verra poor opeenion of foreignors." As a sportsman, of course, his experience of foreigners had not been happy. The gamekeeper made a tour of the house to inspect our defences, noting with approval the strong shutters to the lower windows, bolted with iron bars on the inside. The doors were also very strong, and so, though there were many points open to assault, there was not one that could be forced without giving us due warning of what was going on. While we were at supper I told Forsyth something of the siege I had endured from the men in the house in Berlin, remarking that there I had only one door to defend.

"Ay," said the stolid gamekeeper. "But that time ye had no guns, which is a great thing."

"And I hadn't you," I added, smiling.

At which he was pleased.

I wondered whether I had been quite wise not to retain the constable, in view of the large area we had to defend. But Forsyth brushed this aside.

"Tammy Bruce is much better in his bed," he remarked. "What good would he be here!

He canna' shoot, and he wadna'; but he'd do his best to stop us from having a go at them. Now I think that was a very clever dodge of yours with the rope and the man's hand; but, mind ye, sir, we'll hae nae time for that this nicht. And for myself I'm nae verra clever at such circus-like things; but I've a verra quick forefinger for the gun, and I'm no going to hesitate when once I'm forced to it."

"Of course," I said, "having asked you to help me in a matter that means risking your life I cannot expect you to make the risk greater than it need be; but I may tell you I hope for my mother's sake there will be no shooting to-night. If anyone got killed, even one of these blackguards, it would be impossible for her to continue living here."

Though I said this I had, as you may suppose, but the scantiest hope about it. Nevertheless the gamekeeper understood. He was engaged in oiling my old gun.

"Now, that's just where the dufference lies between a dead shot and a bad shot. A fine shot, the like of myself, can pick and choose where to hit a man, ay, even with a shot-gun; but a bad shot is far more likely to kill. All the same," he added, "I'll kill sooner than be kilt."

"That's all I can expect," I said. "Beyond this, that, to keep us right with Constable Bruce afterwards, I hope we can get them to begin the shooting."

"Quite right, sir," the gamekeeper nodded.

I put out some whisky and invited him to light up. But Forsyth must "set" his dogs before settling himself. The big lurcher, I fancied, would be a useful ally in a tight corner, but the wee stumpy Aberdeen, though game enough, seemed likely to be out of it in a scrimmage. Forsyth smiled at this.

"They're a combination," he said. "Jock has a' the brains and Donal', the lurcher, has a' the strength. Just come and see this!"

He took the little dog along the long passage towards the kitchen, showing him the backdoor and the windows of three separate rooms. The little fellow trotted at his side, evidently understanding. When he had been given his beat his master held up a forefinger.

"Now!" he said.

Jock gave a brief wag of his tail, to signify his comprehension, and we returned to our smoke.

"Nothing will move him now from there," said Forsyth, lighting up. "And he'll signal the slightest noise."

I tried to whistle Jock into the room, but no notice was taken. The big dog set himself to sleep on the hearth-rug at once. Forsyth prodded him with his foot.

"You'll see, sir, how he'll wake up when wee Jockie lets on somebody's hurting him."

"Does he do that?"

"Faith, ay does he, the little deevil; and it's no verra chancy to be the man that Jock complains of to this lurcher."

So we settled ourselves down to talk of many things, passing the hours with phases and facts of the wild life of the forest and moor, subjects that have always a great fascination for me. It was quite impossible for them to rush us in any way. The windows were close shuttered. No light could show outside. And our guns stood handy. For perhaps two hours they gave no sign of their presence. Indeed, the only sound one heard in the intermittent pauses of our talk was but the excessive hooting of the owls in the wood behind the house. I think we were both drowsing a little, tired with our vigil, and with most of our subjects worked dry, when we both started into acute attention. It was a curious little cry that seemed to come from the far end of the passage where Jock was on guard. We sat up staring at each other. I couldn't say I had heard anything, and, except for the fact that the gamekeeper had started up, too, I might have thought it was nothing. The big dog still slumbered on. Forsyth held up his hand warningly.

"Wait!" he whispered. "If it's anything, Jock will speak louder next time."

I took a glance at my watch; it was half-past two. The darkest hours of the night were over. Very soon it would be dawn. We waited listening; but there came no further warning from the

dog. I knew that a strenuous day lay before me, and as Forsyth had been urging me to go and have a sleep, saying that the Aberdeen was sure to give us plenty of time, even supposing he, too, were to fall asleep in his chair, I went upstairs to lie down. It was beginning to strike me as very extraordinary that no attempt had been yet made to force an entrance. From the window I could just discern the dark ghostly outlines of the trees. Up above, the sky was of the dull grey texture which it takes on when the dawn is imminent. But, down below, the deep shadows cast by the trees were numerous enough to have hidden an army. I was sorely tempted to open and look out; it would have relieved me from that feeling of being cooped up; but it would have been very dangerous, I knew, for though I might hear I could not yet see, and would expose myself to the risk of being shot. Then I remembered that there was a skylight in the bathroom on the slope of the roof which could be lifted up noiselessly, even if it chanced for once to be shut. So, carefully, to avoid disturbing my mother, whose room I had to pass, I made my way along to the bathroom. I could of course use no light which would have shown, but I needed none.

This part of the house had been a modern addition to the original building, and its roof was at a considerably lower level than that of the first part. Still, I knew that without a ladder it was

equally impossible to scale, and there was no ladder available. Yet the first thing I saw when I entered was a pair of legs dangling in the air from the skylight.

Had my eyes not grown accustomed to the dark I should not have seen at all. My impulse was to shout a warning to Forsyth below; but somehow I did not. The man, whose body entirely filled the narrow aperture, was carefully feeling with his feet for something to support his descent. They were spidery legs, and his feet were shoeless. Seeing them I thought I might await developments, for I was most unwilling to set up any alarm that would rouse the house. Now I thought I recognised the legs as belonging to my Russian Pole of yesterday, the pedlar with the yellow box, and he, if you remember, was a little man. I thought I could manage him with the help of the big bath towel that was hung on the rack to dry. I got this novel weapon ready. Suddenly the legs went together, slightly bent for a moment, and the fellow landed noiselessly on the floor. He wasn't, however, well there before my wet towel was over his head and we both full length on the ground.

He was so surprised at first that he never uttered a cry or attempted any resistance. When he did, the cry was strangled and feeble, and his struggles in my arms were useless. He was safely trussed up in less time than it takes me to write this account of it. I sat on him while I

considered what next to do. It seemed to me that their plan of operations had been to send the small man inside, to open a door or a window through which the whole gang might rush us. That was perhaps why they had waited for a little light. But how had he reached the skylight? That puzzled me; I stood up on a chair and peered cautiously through. Then I saw! Quite close to the window rose the dark column of the kitchen chimney. There was something round it. In a minute I saw it was a rope, and I could see against the sky that the rope, stretched taut, went at a sharp slope up among the boughs of a big chestnut-tree at the edge of the wood. The distance was no more than twenty feet, and clearly they had swung the rope first round the chimney, made it fast below, and then carried the free end high up the chestnut-tree.

The Russian Pole, who you may remember was not without some experience of seafaring life, had quietly let himself slip from the tree on to the roof. Very likely it was the first rattle of the rope on the slates that had disturbed the Aberdeen. After that they made no noise. It was clever—I had to admit that. It was perhaps the only possible way. Into that stoutly shuttered house, with well armed and determined men to defend it, they could not break a way. They had to find a method by which they could outwit both dogs and men. Well, they would have to lose more time. Let them find out that their

scheme had miscarried by waiting! They would be finely puzzled at the absence of any sign of either failure or success.

I wanted to have a look at the fellow, but of course dared not strike a match. They would be watching eagerly enough. Let them. The dark house had swallowed up the messenger, and would be as silent as before. Anyhow, I judged we might count on half an hour; so I picked up the man, got him under my arm, and carefully made my way downstairs and along to the dining-room. Forsyth had his gun up as I entered the open door, but recognising me he lowered it, staring. The lurcher, however, didn't like what I carried, and came round sniffing, with low growls.

I explained hurriedly, while Forsyth passed his hands through the man's pockets. He extracted, first, a revolver from the breast-pocket, and then from the belt a long sheath-knife. I took possession of both. The revolver was a Browning, and might be useful to one later.

"Now let's have a look at him," I said as I unwound the cord of my dressing-gown which fastened the towel round his head and body.

"The pedlar with the yellow box!" cried Forsyth.

"Joseph Dewinski!" I cried, astonished.

And so, indeed, it was. He stood there just gibbering with rage, in impotent fury, the superior, calm, masterful disdain clean knocked

out of him for once. It was pleasant to me to look on him then and to remember the airy insolence, the quite gratuitous insolence, of his parting salute to me on the night when I got possession of the Little Eitel paper. But if you ask how it came to pass that I had not recognised him in the pedlar with the yellow tin box, I cannot answer. I can only say that the thing was so. Perhaps it was simply because Dewinski did not will me to recognise him then. Perhaps I was on the point of it when the shots were fired. I do not know. Yet the strange fact remains that Forsyth, looking on the man in his own character of Joseph Dewinski—if this really was the man himself, and not one of his many parts—saw in him the pedlar with the yellow box, while I seeing him as a pedlar saw not the Joseph Dewinski. As I say, I merely state the fact, without pretending to have any explanation.

He was an evil man, Joseph Dewinski; there were elements in him that might have belonged to the Enemy of Mankind himself. God forbid that I should speak harshly or uncharitably of a man who had to pay such a terrible price for his crimes; but, if the truth is spoken, he was a man who loved evil with a disinterested devotion, and followed it as an ideal. Frail in health as I judged him to be, fragile in body as I knew he was, behind the outer physical impotence were mental powers not surpassed by more than three, or possibly only two, of any of the men of in-

tellest I have known. I am not sure, even now, that he was of Hebrew blood; but it would be charitable to think he was, and that the age-long oppression of that race was responsible both for the physical incapacity and the perversion of his mental gifts.

"Ye ken the fellow then?" said Forsyth.

"I recognise him," I answered.

Dewinski almost smiled on me. He was certainly not without vanity, and he took, and appreciated the distinction that was lost on the game-keeper. He was recovering the habitual sangfroid, which I had so severely damaged by my rough handling.

"Could I have a drink?" he asked. "And may I sit down?"

Motioning him to a chair, I poured out a little peg of whisky and passed the cigarettes.

"That which made me a *libre penseur*," he remarked, making a wry face at the drink, "was the thought that if Intelligence lay behind Creation, the merely physical would never have been given any kind of superiority over the intellectual."

Forsyth at this resumed his chair.

"Meaning," I said, "that I, the fool, got the better of you, the wise man."

"You put it crudely, Abercromby, but—well, you take my point." He shrugged.

I was nettled. A man may be an athlete without being imbecile; and physical degeneracy is

no guarantee of mental genius. Perhaps I might with fairness have pointed out to him that I had had to match his gang with something more than thews or muscles; but I preferred he should continue to think of me as a simple fellow, incapable of penetrating into the Little Eitel's secret. It was not impossible that he was provoking me into such a proof of my cleverness as would let him know to what use I had put the paper.

"Perhaps," I said, taking his first point, "it would be for the good of your soul, and the health of the society in which you mix, if you could see that Victory sometimes depends on qualities that are neither intellectual nor physical, but moral."

This speech affected his face in much the same manner as his first sup of the whisky had done.

"Spoken like a true Scotsman," he cried; and I marvelled at the man's varied knowledge of racial idiosyncrasies. He crossed one leg over the other and flicked the ash of his cigarette on to the carpet. "Now," he continued, "won't you sit down and let us consider that?" He smiled in his feline way, and, as usual, there was a sneer.

To this invitation to the use of one of my own chairs I gave a curt nod of refusal.

"Sorry," I said. "You consider it yourself, while I go and have a look at your friends outside."

They must be considering what next to do since you are absent."

Dewinski did not like that. The pitfall of all high intellect is that it is apt to imagine that an inferior quality of intellect is non-existent.

A plan of operations had been forming itself in my mind since the capture of Dewinski. There was some reason to believe that the disappearance, and silence, of that gentleman would have a disquieting effect upon his companions outside. I had no doubt that the fellow who had examined my room, with a view to structural alterations, had also taken the opportunity of examining the rest of the house. They would know that the skylight belonged to the bathroom, and would expect to make a safe and undisturbed entrance there. Nevertheless it was hardly credible that Dewinski would embark on his adventures without providing for contingencies. I guessed what one of them would be: that since I was the quarry I must be hunted down, that nothing, and no one else, not even himself, was of the least importance; and that I must be taken by any means whatever, before another day dawned.

This night attack on a lonely house was not a thing that could be kept quiet, and the fact that they were prepared to make it was evidence in itself that they intended this should be their last effort. Therefore I was under no illusion as to the danger in which the house stood. They had to get me. And sooner than let the day break

without accomplishing that I am certain, now, they would, but for Dewinski's presence in it, have set fire to the house. So I have to confess, therefore that the plan I formed was more or less forced on me. It was myself they were after. Very well, I must get away, somehow, and take them with me. By this time I was back at the skylight, listening. Whatever plans Dewinski had left with them it was now high time to put them into execution. Day would soon be here. I had brought from my room a strong knicker suit and a stout pair of shoes into which I changed, transferring the Little Eitel document, some money, and the Browning pistol.

Jock began to bark loudly.

Then as I looked out at the window I saw the rope swaying violently. Some one was on it at the other end, evidently coming on, hand over hand. I jumped back and got a razor from the shelf, and in a minute had shot out my arm full length. He must have been a big heavy man, for the razor went through the rope as if it had been cheese. The fellow gave a cry as he fell. I heard him go with a dull thud against the garden wall, under the trees—a broken leg would be a small price to pay for that fall. Anyhow that was one more out of action, and as the bridge was down I ran for the dining-room, to find Forsyth gone; but not Dewinski, nor the lurcher. The dog had him in a corner, in terror, immovable. From the kitchen I heard a loud hammer-

ing noise, Jockie wildly summoning the lurcher, and the big dog running towards the door, and then back again, uncertain as to where his duty lay. I threw myself on Dewinski, trussed him up in a bundle, arms and legs, while he cursed me furiously, kicking and biting like an animal, and before I had finished the lurcher had gone. When I got into the hall, my mother called to me from the top of the staircase. I could just see her, a glimmering figure in white standing at the top of the stairs, Kirsty beside her.

"What is it, Hugh?" she called.

So I had to run up and quieten her fears, leading her back to her room. There in briefest fashion I told her who these men were and what was the nature of the paper they sought. What did she think I should do?

I did not doubt her answer.

"Go and deliver it to the authorities responsible for the safety of your country, and God guide you," she said.

She pushed me gently from the room. I got Kirsty MacKellar to accompany me to the front door, telling her she was to shut and lock it the moment I was out. From the back the dogs were still barking furiously, but I knew that, at any rate until I heard Forsyth shoot, there was no danger to the house.

I wanted to get away before that. As I unbolted the door and stepped outside, there was just the grey dull light in which one could dis-

tinguish the heavy dark clouds overhead that gave the promise of rain later on. There seemed to be no one at all on this side of the house. As I anticipated, they did not dream of an exit being attempted, least of all perhaps by the front door; and they had all gone, less two, to force an entrance from the back.

What a pity it was that I could not take advantage of such a chance! I knew I must draw them off; there was no other way! Still! I slipped over among the shrubbery, and from the midst of it saw along the side of the house where they were operating. I could just distinguish five, or perhaps six, men. They were bringing up a long heavy object which seemed like a fallen tree. Yes! with that as a ram they would soon have the shutters battered in. Dewinski's pistol was in my hand.

Up till this moment, you will remember, I had never lifted my hand against any of their lives. Not even now did I wish to take life there. Elsewhere, and later, I would have killed any of them with less thought than I would have killed a rabbit; but not there if it could be avoided. Yet I was presently to be let in for a long chase in which to be caught meant certain death. I was very fit for running, probably far fitter than any German; still you can imagine how I scanned the five dark figures getting their log ready to see which was the best man to wing. There was little light to go by, but I picked out the thinnest and

fired. They dropped their log as if it had suddenly turned red-hot in their hands. But I had missed. I tried another, and they ran and flattened themselves against the wall of the house. Evidently they were greatly puzzled as to where the shots came from. I could hear their mumbled talk and see them craning their heads carefully, looking at the windows, their own pistols uplifted.

Against the wall, however, they were a much better target for me than before, and my third shot dropped one of them. He started to scream horribly, writhing on the ground like a worm that has been cut in halves by a spade. The others left the wall and rushed into the shrubbery, where I could not see them. By and by I heard the snapping of twigs that told me they were working their way towards me. It was getting too hot, and I judged it time to be gone. Leaping the low wire fence that separated the garden on the east from the fields, I set off running down the slope towards the burn. They saw me almost at once, and a volley came flying after me that did no harm. Taking a glance behind, I saw that five men were getting over the fence. This was more than I bargained for. Then I set my face towards the hills.

CHAPTER IX

THE country that lay before me was open and almost treeless. After the burn was crossed the ground on the left, towards which I was heading—because in that direction lay the railway, which was my only real hope of escape—began to rise in gradual slopes, till the highest point was reached on the Knock, which was an outlying spur of the Grampians, and overlooked the great level plain of fat agricultural lands, through which the railway ran, and beyond which, seven miles away, was the sea.

Once I had splashed through the shallow burn, I had some cultivated fields to cross, and then the ground was rough pasture-land for the hill sheep, till a yet higher level was attained where the heather began. It was my intention to cut across the pasture diagonally, till, at a point before the heather was reached, I struck on the road which crossed the hills to the small village of Drumliddie. Here there was a wayside railway station, at which though few trains stopped, I hoped to get away on one that did.

When I had run at a steady pace for twenty

minutes or so, and was now free of the cultivated land, I had a look back to see how the pursuit was faring. It may be imagined that this look was one of moment for me. I thought of it before I turned my head: it would tell me much as to my chances. A glance revealed to me that two had already fallen out. One of the men, however, was not more than three hundred yards behind, but even so he had not gained a foot on me from the start; and I thought my staying powers would make it unlikely that he should now gain on me. The other two were fairly close together, but a long way behind. So on I went again, over and up the pasture, towards the hill. It was perhaps a pity that I had not left the house sooner, for it was now practically daylight.

I was beginning to "breathe" by the time I got to the top of the first slope, and I had my second look, while I regained my wind beside the big stone of Druidic origin that stands there. The nearest man was uncomfortably near, but the others were still far behind, mere black dots, moving up the hill. I lay down beside the big boulder and had a shot at the runner who was closing in on me. He pulled up at once, flinging himself on the turf. Then he himself got to work. A bullet flattened itself on the rock above my head. The rock was a protection to me, while he lay exposed in the open. I had another go at him, and he didn't like it, for he rolled him-

self over and over till he got into a depression in the ground where he was less exposed.

Then he gave me "zipp—zipp—zipp" in quick succession, and I was in the worse position, for he probably had plenty of ammunition, and was certainly much the better marksman with that weapon, while I had only such shots as the magazine of the "gun" held. I did not know how many the thing held, either six or seven I thought, but I had already expended four, therefore I withheld my fire, expecting him to come on again, and intending to get him at close range from behind the rock. But the fellow did not come on. He was quite content to lie there and wait for the arrival of his friends. That would never do; I should be taken on all sides, surrounded. I stole a look and saw him watching me. If only I could get this fast fellow winged how easy it would be! I wasted one bullet more to get that watching head down, and by a fluke it must have gone very close, for he went down, and kept down, it seems, till the shout of the other two coming on showed him that I was away again.

Now the ground lay down hill for a little, and at the bottom of the slight slope was the highest point touched by the road to Drumliddie. Beyond the road was the steep slope of the Knock, all heather and gorse and tall bracken. I was running now "all out," more like a sprinter than a miler. Vaulting the fence I went helter-skelter

along the Drumliddie road. If their fast man maintained his distance at that pace I was ready to bet that his moustache at least no longer pointed into his eyes.

It must then have been well after four o'clock, for the sun was up, and with the sunlight came exaltation, and, with the fresh air to put the oxygen of the morning into the lungs, my feet went tapping on the road with the speed of a machine-gun. I had gone on so for some time, hearing nothing but the rhythmic sound of my own running; and then I became conscious of another sound that began to mingle with it, a low throbbing which, at first, I took to be my heart-beat; but soon it swelled in volume, and I knew it for the sound of a motor engine, coming on rapidly behind. This was better luck than I had reason to hope for! Almost certainly it would be the village doctor, called out at this early hour to some outlying sheep-farm among the hills. Anyway I was pretty sure not to fail of getting a lift whoever it might be; so I slackened down and stood waiting in the middle of the road.

When it whirled into sight I saw it was a big, grey touring car, certainly not the good doctor's Ford. Its occupants let out a shout at seeing me. My knees gave a queer kind of shiver, and in the shock of discouragement, for a moment, I stood helpless. It must have seemed then that I was transfixed with fear. And so I was! But only

for a second. Two wild leaps, and I was scrambling on hands and knees up the bank of the road on the north side, and I heard the brakes jammed on and the slither of tyres on the road as I tore through the thick gorse that covers the lower slopes of the Knock. Sometimes on hands and knees, sometimes bent double, on I ran. Torn with the prickly gorse and brambles, sometimes thrown down, but up again almost on the bound; at times having to dig my nails into the earth for leverage, over or through all obstacles I tore a way. For I knew that the grey car held men that had done no running yet, and that for me, on this effort, hung life or death.

Up and up I went, cutting a diagonal course across the western face of the hill. From time to time I heard a shout behind, and knew that either I had been seen or that the moving bracken or the swaying gorse had revealed my course to my pursuers. My heart thumped dull and hard with the tremendous strain, and my breath whistled in my lungs and cut like a knife; but I dare not pause for a moment.

The Knock hill rises to a flat plateau of an acre or two of heather, which is a splendid shelter to lie in, and very comfortable, once you are in it, but which is quite useless as cover for a man running. I had therefore to get well out of sight before the heather belt was reached, and so when I arrived at the altitude where the gorse became thin and the open heather near the top began,

my course must be changed so as to hide my direction.

Away on the left there was a belt of young spruce, like a long green ribbon, that stretched from the road up the hill, ending just under the crest. From below, as they toiled upward they saw me, as I intended they should, till I entered the belt of trees. Once on the other side I mounted up for a while, and then, when I judged my pursuers themselves were nearly through the trees, I cut in among them again, but much higher up, and with infinite precautions, going very slowly, and taking care not to set any growing thing swinging, nor to send a stone rolling, I made off to the right, on a course that would take me to the east side of the hill. Several times I had to go across the bare places on hands and knees; and it was terrible work where the old heather had been burnt for the grouse.

It seemed ages before I had worked my way round to the eastern brow. More than ever I should be visible against the skyline if I stood up. So, crawling on, I worked round till what with the musty smell of the heather in my exhausted brain, and my knees so tender that every foot covered was a separate agony, and my eyes half blind with dust and sweat, I suddenly went headforemost into a little pocket of the ground that was quite hidden, for the heather almost met over it from each side. So long as the progress had been mechanical, I seemed able to go on; but my

brain was too numbed, and my muscles too long set to the one sort of action for me to initiate the different kind of effort that would get me up again, and out of that little hollow. So I lay still. The last sound I had heard of my pursuers was the noise that they had made crashing through the spruces, before I doubled back.

How long I lay there I do not know. I must have been in little better than a semi-conscious condition for some time, and then, when my head allowed it, I must have fallen asleep; and I do not know either how long I slept. I remember coming to a sort of half-wakefulness, and feeling for my watch could not find it. And I remember clearing my eyes, as best I could, from the grit and dust as I sat up to look round. The depression in which I was formed a complete concealment when I lay down, but was so shallow that when I sat up my head came clear above the heather.

It was a sight panoramic in extent that met my eyes. Away below me stretched the variegated country, each field with its separate tint, like a little square in the distance, the fresh green of the new springing grass on cut hayfields chequered the rich yellows of the ripening fields of corn. Dotted over the surface were the roofs of farm-houses, encircled by trees amid which the thin, blue smoke rose vapoury in the still air. Under the hill at my feet the creak of a cart on the road ascended. At intervals in the far dis-

tance I saw the white fleecy smoke that showed the train working its way across the plain. Far above my head a lark sang and I leaned back to listen. The wild extravagant ecstasy of his music was everywhere, and it was hard to believe that the little dark speck I at length discerned against the pale blue vastness could so fill the world with sound. These things, and a hundred others, I considered as I lay in the heather all through the long summer day.

I was not without alarms. Once I heard near me the "swish-swish" a man's steps make in walking through heather, and lay back, ready to shoot. But the steps passed on, and I know not whether they were the steps of a pursuer or of some harmless shepherd. Later, near me, a grouse rose suddenly with its burst of cackle that sounds so like jeering laughter, and for a moment my heart stood still; and I had to crouch low again, thinking it had been startled into flight by some one's approach. But nobody came my way, and probably it was some movement of my own that had sent the bird scuttering. Later still I must have fallen asleep again for many hours, for when I awoke the evening was well advanced, and indeed here and there, away down below me, I could see the lighted windows of widely separated farm-houses.

I was stiff and cold, for the sun had long left this side of the hill, and though I had taken the precaution of pulling enough heather to make a

bed, yet the place itself was not of the driest. But to be cold and sore with cramp was not what afflicted me most; it was my hunger, and even more my thirst. It was a blessed thing for me that my second long sleep had come when it did, before the worst pangs of thirst came on, for otherwise I do not think I could have slept at all, even with the sleepless previous night, and the exhaustion of chase behind me. Some forms of exhaustion, I have observed, conduce to sleep, and in the sleep strength is conserved, or even in some measure regained. But with the exhaustion that comes from thirst it is not so. Men do not sleep then; they go mad.

Not, however, till darkness enfolded all the plain, and almost all save the farm lights had disappeared, did I leave my hiding-place. It was clearly impossible, now, to think of escape by train. I had no doubt at all that every station up and down the line for twenty miles had its watcher. But this did not trouble me then. They might guard railway stations and roads; they could not watch all these farms from which the kindly lights shone as beacons to me, and above all it was food and drink I wanted.

The memory of that long descent is more or less dream-like. I have no clear memory of it, or of what befell me. I only recall the lights, at first far down below me, like little twinkling stars, as if I had indeed gone mad, and the sky and earth had changed positions. And then the

stars began to climb up to me, till they reached my own level, and shone in front of me; and then all merged into one that became very big, and near enough to stretch out my hand and touch. People came out and spoke to me, and led me inside. I told them I had been lost on the hills, for that is how I then thought it was.

But after I had eaten and drunk, having nothing else than hunger and thirst the matter with me, I was soon as a new man, at which the good folk were surprised, thinking I had been wandering all day. It was a ploughman's cottage I had lighted on, and the man, in his rough working clothes, sat and rocked a cradle with his foot, while his wife attended to my needs. The wakeful child regarded me with staring eyes. In the big bed against the wall two elder children lay fast asleep, their faces flushed. I paid these good people for the meal, though the taking of money gave them discomfort, and left after getting from them careful directions as to the way I must take to reach Stonehive.

I had of course no intention of going to Stonehive, but I knew it was quite likely that some one, speaking English with a foreign accent, would come to their door asking for news of me, and so I thought it well to risk nothing. In point of fact I set off in the other direction at once. For there came to me as if by inspiration the scheme by which I was to throw my pursuers off the trail, and by which I was to get a good start

by rail. But it was no railway station I sought. I remembered that some miles south there lay a lonely spot that was once famous in the days when two great railway companies ran races between London and the North.

This spot was the place where the two lines joined into one for the remainder of the journey. There was nothing there but the signal-man's cabin. In the years of which I speak that cabin was a famous place, for the signal-man it was who decided which route won for the day, passing on the train which was "belled" first, detaining its rival till the first was clear ahead. Yet though these exhilarating races were long ended, trains were still sometimes held up for either line to clear at such places—fish trains, mineral and goods, even the stately London train itself. If one did stop it would be hard if I did not get aboard.

There was great heartening in the thought; and once I got on the main road it briskened my going finely. The night was fine and still, the stars bright overhead, and in this agricultural country-side, where people are early abed, the road was empty save for an occasional young ploughman making for home after an evening's courtship at some neighbouring farm. But all the same I was wary of all travellers, and took the other side of the hedges, especially when I heard the sound of an approaching car. It must have been about ten when I came to the dangerous

spot. This was the Westwater Bridge. Here the road crosses the river of that name just before you come to the junction I mentioned. It was a good point for them to watch, for the river is both rapid and deep. I soon saw it was not forgotten. Approaching cautiously from behind the hedge, at first the way seemed clear, for there was no one on the rise of the bridge; but just as I prepared to jump back on to the road again I glanced along the arch of the bridge and saw the dark figure of a man who seemed to be leaning on the parapet, looking down into the water. But for the fact that I was in the field, and on that side of the road, I should never have seen him till I was fairly on the bridge, and then it would have been too late.

I crawled rapidly away. There was still the railway bridge. Should I try that? The river there was shallower and broader and the bridge much longer. As I debated with myself a train went thundering over, and I could see the stoker coaling the furnace, a column of light ascending obliquely into the dark from the open furnace door. I dared not risk it. This bridge would not be forgotten, and if, as was almost certain, it was at the far end they watched there would be no retreat possible, for the bridge was very long. So I took to the water higher up, and save for the wetting it was not so very bad, as it was only for perhaps five yards I had to swim. It was thus that I came to Kilaber junction and sat down

on the embankment, near the south signals, to wait for my luck.

I was very cold in my wet clothes. The signal-box with its glass sides alight looked very cheerful, and I could hear the night signal-man whistling to himself as he moved about at his work. From time to time a bell would ring, and there would be a clang of metal as he worked the levers which adjusted the points, and down and up the line I would see a signal light change from red to white or green. But always the line seemed to be clear that night, for nothing was ever pulled up. I was fairly beginning to know despair when the third goods train thundered past, and I was considering if I ought not to be going on, lest daylight should find me still there, when close on its heels, I heard the low rumble of a following train, away back on the Westwater Bridge, and knew that it was scarcely possible it would find the road clear so soon after the other. Hope rose higher when I saw the home signal remain red. On came the train; but presently, sure enough, there was a grinding from the brakes, sparks flew out from the wheels, and with a clang of the buffers that went all the length of the train, the big engine came to a standstill under the lighted signal-box windows. It was not, alas, a general goods train, in which there are usually some uncovered waggons, but a fast fish train. I could hear an interchange of banter between engine and signal-box, and when I had

run down the train and mounted the guard's van, the official in charge was leaning out of the other door, watching and listening. He never heard me, as I slipped inside and sat down on the bench. Then a bell rang in the signal-box, a perfunctory touch on the whistle, and we began to move. The guard hung out of his van to shout some pleasantry to the signal-man, and then turned round.

"My God!" he cried, seeing me.

"Where does this train go to?" I asked him.

"What do you want here?" he asked, anger rising.

It was a case for impudence.

"If you are asking me about the thing I most long for, I may tell you it is a good smoke."

He stared at me, for a moment I think he took me for a lunatic; but then he laughed. He was a little, rosy-complexioned man, with a scanty flaxen moustache like an old tooth-brush.

"Well, if you have na' got cheek enough for a dozen!"

I told him I was very sorry to have to invade his van, but I had been lost on the hills, had been through a river, and in danger of my life, and that any Christian would light the stove that stood in the centre of the van and let me dry myself.

"Ay," he remarked, scanning me, "it may be as you say: ye are no tramp, for ye speak like a

gentleman, and yer clothes, though in bad condition, are harmonious. But we're no allowed to carry passengers, and I must put ye off at our first stop. By rights I ought to hand you over to the police forbye."

All this time he was on his hands and knees before the little stove, getting the fire going. And before it I sat, and got dry while the train bowled along into Forfarshire, and we talked when we could.

"Where's your first stop?" I asked.

"Berwick is the first place we're booked to stop at," he answered, grinning. "It's a fish train ye're on, ye ken."

"I knew it was a fish train," I said.

"What!" he cried. "Dinna say ye *smelt* my train already. But Loard, what would ye expect else, when we've been pulled up thrice in just twenty miles!"

This was his semi-sad, humorous sarcasm, evoked by slow local goods trains which blocked the way, and compelled signal-men to fling the red light before his perishable cargo.

All the same we seemed to find little ahead of us after that, and the fast train flashed through lonely and dimly lit stations, roared into tunnels and rattled over high bridges, in a way that rocked the van from side to side continuously, and that did promise to fulfil the guard's boast—that his fish would be in time for the sleeping Londoner's breakfast. His spirits, like mine, be-

gan to rise with every landmark passed. Lost time can be made up on these trains, where the scheduled stops are few. But, alas, we had no sooner crossed the Tay than there came a slackening. Something in front again!

"Dom!" cried the guard. "This is just awfu'."

I asked him where we were.

"Just outside Thornton Junction," he answered. "I'll have to put ye off if we stop, ye ken; so I hope you'll gang gently. It's my duty," he explained, looking at me questioningly.

Thornton Junction! It was good enough. In any case it was not possible to go all the way to London on that train; and I did think that I had covered my trail pretty effectually, this time. So I reassured the little man as to there being no need of muscular effort on his part to get rid of me; and when we did pull up I climbed down, after we had shaken hands. He waved to me a kindly farewell as his train moved on, after I had reached the top of the embankment. I thought this was final, but there was another clatter of buffers, and another dead stop.

"Dom!" he cried aloud, almost in anguish. "What about my fish noo?"

"It will be in time for supper anyway!" I comforted him.

"Ay," he answered gloomily, "for the penny fish suppers in the East End."

This sally made me laugh heartily, and, without

joining in, he watched me, leaning out of his van-door, arms folded:

"Ye're a queer kind of a fish yersel', ye ken," he remarked, nodding. "Comin' out o' the watter and on to my train the way ye did. Did ye expect me to believe yon story?" The train began to move again, and he bent out further. "Look here, Mr. MacTavish," he called in a stage whisper, "ye've been on the spree I doubt. Gang straight home, my lad, and keep aff the drink. But if so be ye canna resist so great a temptation, keep aff the railway when ye're on it."

This time his wave was final, and soon the little red tail-lamp on his van was no more than a speck in the distance.

When I had covered the distance between the junction and St. Andrews, the first sound I heard from the silent old grey town was the church clock striking three. The whole place lay still like a deserted city, and it took me a long while ere I lighted on the Ranfurly Road, which was where Miss Thompson lived. It was a road of big old grey houses that would stand solid when their enclosing shrubberies writhed and fretted in the wild east winds to which they were exposed. At this hour both winds and people were equally asleep, and the only sound that met my ear was the low, regular, pulsation of the sea on the beach.

For a while I walked up and down outside the house, wondering what I could do, and not seeing any immediate course of action open to me

that was other than selfish. Could I dare to waken the household at that hour? I hadn't considered the point at all on my journey, but now the plain fact is that I was overcome by the old ladylike respectability of the town, and it seemed monstrous to start ringing bells in such a place, at such an hour. Miss Thompson had told me little of her family. I knew no more than that she lived with a sister much older than herself. Of this sister's character and disposition I knew nothing; but now I pictured her as a rather old-maidish person, prim and proper, and in strong contrast to Margarita, who had been made something of a rebel, I supposed, by force of reaction either against the old-maidish sister, or the old-maidish town, or both.

I had been walking up and down awhile, a prey to indecision, when I was startled indeed by seeing the door open and Miss Thompson herself appear. She stood looking at me, never saying a word. Her hair was hanging about her shoulders, and she wore a dark dressing-gown. Her dark hair made her face look very bright, and her eyes were shining queerly. I went up to her and said:

"This is very strange that you should come down just when I was wanting to see you."

"I knew you were there," she answered, looking straight into my face.

This reply made me stare back for I was thinking it was very possible she was ill, after all she

had gone through, which was a thought new to me, for the likelihood of it had never before entered into my mind.

"Oh, there's nothing mysterious about it," she cried. "I do not sleep very soundly just now, and well—you were whistling that Dance from 'Henry the Eighth.' "

"Well, what about it?" I asked, more puzzled than before.

"It's what you were whistling after we caught that man in the flat in Berlin."

"But anybody else might be whistling that air," I argued. "It's pretty well known. You might have had a disappointment, getting up so early," which was a foolish thing to say if you come to think of it.

Miss Thompson smiled.

"Anyone might be whistling it here at four o'clock in the morning; but it's not likely they would make the same mistakes in the same places."

And I could do nothing but laugh at myself. She drew me inside the door, noting all the stains and rents, for my long flight among the heather and gorse of the Knock had left many traces.

"It's the second time I've come to your door like a ragged beggar-man," I said.

She flushed a little, and laughed, as she took hold of my arm.

"Come away then, and this time I hope you will not bring in as much trouble at your heels."

So I gave her an account of all my adventures, telling her of the pedlar on the bridge, the attack on the house, the day I had on the hills, and my travels on the fish-express, leaving out nothing, saving the discovery I had made about Little Eitel's paper; for that detail I kept back awhile, remembering the humiliation of our parting. The fact is, I was hoping to be questioned about it and by my reply make an impression that would re-establish my damaged amour-propre. But the queer girl never mentioned the paper, and when I had ended wished to send me upstairs to sleep. I told her I did not feel at all like sleeping, but if she could shelter me till night, when I would leave to catch the London train, I would gladly rest later in the day, for I knew that the less I was seen in public the better.

"You do not think they can trace you here?" she asked.

I told her it was hard to tell since they had traced me so far, but I did not see how it was humanly possible, for there was but one man who had set eyes on me between the ploughman's house and her own door. This seemed to content her, and set her thinking. At last the question came for which I had waited:

"That paper, have you still got it?" I touched my breast pocket. Now, I said to myself, I'll make her see how foolish was her pity of me.

She hesitated, and then continued: "Did you ever think of letting them have it?"

"Never," I said. "Never for a moment."

"But it is such a trifling thing, and they set such store by it as to be ready to take your life to get it."

"Trifling!" I cried. "Do you call that paper trifling?"

"Well, isn't it—a child's drawing of sheep and trees and other animals?"

It was my hour, and I said:

"I am afraid, Miss Thompson, you do not understand the significance of those 'sheep and trees and other animals.' When you saw them in Edinburgh I am afraid you were simple-minded enough to take that paper at its face-value." She opened her eyes wide at this. "If that paper is a thing on which they set such store as to be ready to take a man's life, and risk their own, to get it back, surely it cannot be called a trifling thing."

She was an argumentative little thing.

"Valuable for some mysterious reason to them perhaps, but surely trifling to you."

Upon that I took out the paper and, unfolding it, laid it on the table under her eyes.

"Judge for yourself whether it is trifling," I said.

She scanned it earnestly enough, puckering up her eyes.

"I see no sense in it at all," she said. "It's just a child's haphazard drawings."

"Come, Miss Thompson! The thing positively cries aloud with meaning. Does it not strike you as strange, to begin with, that this little Eitel left the date of his father's birthday blank, to be filled in later, after his father was born? And that eagle floating on the top—I suppose you've seen that breed of eagle before?"

"On the German flag!" she interjected.

"And the dead lion at the bottom."

"The British lion!"

"Yes; and the transfixed heart—What is the heart of the Empire?"

"London!" She was eager enough now. "What does it mean? Oh, tell me!"

"It is a scheme for the invasion of England from three separate points, as diabolical as it is clever. But there's a lot in it I don't yet understand."

We were both gazing on the fateful drawing when a light suddenly broke in on me, and I cried:

"My heavens! I see it now—that stone on the top of the mountain is not threatening the church. It is not a mountain at all, it is not a stone, it is not a church, and those archery butts have nothing to do with the arrows!"

CHAPTER X

THAT same evening I caught the late London mail train at the junction. During the day Miss Thompson, whose elder sister was away on a visit to friends, sent off several wires on my behalf, to which, with one exception, I received satisfactory replies. This exception was the message I received from my mother, telling me that the prisoner had escaped. She herself was going to my uncle's in Aberdeen for awhile. As to the escape of Dewinski I was not sure whether to be glad or sorry. His disappearance, at any rate, saved my home from a publicity that would be unwelcome to my mother, and I was disposed to believe that it would be better for the whole affair to be handled by the Whitehall Office. Still, Dewinski's was the master brain, and I had need to be very wary now that he was free again.

The first mark of respect I paid to Dewinski's recovered freedom was to leave the train before it ran into King's Cross. Knowing that such trains are frequently pulled up for a minute or so by the traffic of the London suburban trains, I

took my chance when it came, getting out at Wood Green, and from there going by taxi to town. As it was still too early to seek for an interview with the Minister, being only 8.30, I made a leisurely breakfast at a quiet hotel in Bloomsbury, and while reading the newspaper in the process I learned with satisfaction that the Minister was in town:

“Mr. Horniman yesterday made two visits to Downing Street, the first, about noon, was very brief; but from the second at 3.30 the Right Hon. gentleman did not return to the Whitehall Office till 5 o'clock.”

Being quite unversed in the affairs of political life, I had no idea as to why such visits called for report in the Press; but I supposed there must be some significance attached to them, and to their duration. What struck me was that I might count on putting my paper into the hands of the Minister himself. At 10 o'clock therefore I telephoned from the hotel to the Whitehall Office and learned that the great man had not yet arrived but was expected every minute. What would be the best hour to come and see him? Well, who was I? The Minister did not have set hours for consultation, like a medical specialist; surely I knew that? Difficult to see him? Not the slightest difficulty if I had an appointment. If I hadn't—impossible. I hadn't an appoint-

ment! Well, write for one, or get a letter of introduction from some one known to Mr. Horniman. Then I told them my business was of such insistency and gravity that it positively could not wait on the ordinary routine of approach. The fellow at the other end appeared to be getting impatient, for I was told dryly that The Office was not unaccustomed to business of national importance, and only occasionally dealt with trifles by way of pastime.

On that, I said something forcible to myself which was overheard.

"Tut, tut!" said the junior clerk, as he cut off communication, and, I suppose, went back to play at noughts and crosses.

I got on the telephone again, this time with a Member with whom I had a slight acquaintance, and was lucky enough to find him at breakfast—there had been a late sitting of the House on the previous night. I recalled myself to his memory, telling him I was very anxious to see Mr. Horniman, and had the notion that he might use his influence with some personage to obtain an introduction for me; but luckily he cut in before I had finished, saying that if I called round to his club in an hour he himself would leave a letter for me, which would secure me the desired admission. I thanked him heartily, and he expressed regret that he was prevented by a pressing engagement from seeing me, and, before ringing off, asked very kindly after my Uncle John, saying he had

not run across him lately, which was not wonderful, as my Uncle John had been dead for four years. I did not remind him, however, of that fact, since I was very sensible of his kindness in being so ready to serve one who belonged to a family no longer resident in his constituency.

It was with a certain inward glow of contentment that, having called for and duly received the promised letter, I turned my face towards the Whitehall Office. Naturally enough, now that my job was nearing completion, my thoughts ran back on the details of its history. Perhaps I hadn't done so very badly. It had been a good education for me—a gain in subtlety and capability for practical action. In fact I'm not sure, at that moment, that I was not rather regretful at the thought of being about to give up my control of the affair, of having to hand over little Eitel's drawing to others. Yes, I thought I had handled the affair with some neatness and precision, at any rate towards the end. That escape on the fish-train, for instance, how that must have left them guessing! I whistled happily and walked on. Oh, it is a great thing to feel the sense of mastery that accompanies a well-finished job. Alas, all too soon I was to have an emphatic reminder that such thoughts were premature!

My course had lain from King Street to St. James's Square and the Mall to the top of Whitehall, and I was cutting across that wide thoroughfare from about the Horseguards to reach the

Whitehall Office a little further down. It was foolish, in such a place of fast moving traffic, to indulge in a brown study. There was no excuse for me, I had had my warning. Again it was a shout that brought me to my senses. I looked up and there was a car almost on the top of me. I tried to jump clear, but the wood blocks were slippery, and I fell.

It was all over in a second. A policeman and a passing carter lifted me up and took me to the island.

"Great Jerusalem!" said the carter. "I never saw anything like that in my life!"

"What happened?" I asked, feeling I ought to be dead.

"Narrowest thing I ever saw, sir," said the policeman. "Car put on its brakes as you went down, and it did a swerving skid right in the direction you lay. Never touched you at all, I don't think. Move on there."

This last to the circle of open-mouthed gazers that had gathered round. The carter went back to his team. I had been a fool, and was very angry in consequence.

"Look here," I said to the policeman, "that car tried to run me down!"

He looked at me and smiled.

"Don't be foolish," he said. "That car's been up and down here ever since I came on duty. Waiting for some Gov'mint official."

This did not in the least convince me.

"Why didn't it stop then?" I asked hotly.

"Knew you 'adn't been touched—good job for you too, what with the brakes on an' that. Now," he continued, finality in his tone, "I'd advise you to be getting on, and next time not depend on gymnastics to save your neck: the age of miracles is past, and don't you forget it."

Of course it may have been as he said.

The Whitehall Office is, as every one knows, a handsome structure nobly proportioned. Erected some five years before, to the beauty of its proportions there was now being added beauty of detail, which promised to make it the finest Government building in London. Shaken as I was by the incident just related I was glad, before presenting myself to the Minister, to regain composure by a short inspection of the work then proceeding. Along its front were rows of scaffolding like balconies, and on these sculptors were working. I had always taken some interest in architecture and was drawn to examine a completed Renaissance entablature of fine scroll work on one of the windows under the scaffolding. Seeming to discern a want of proportion in this work, I stepped back to obtain a better view, and on the instant I did so something struck the pavement at my feet. It was a sculptor's heavy wooden mallet, and it landed on the very spot I had the moment before occupied. Involuntarily I took a step backwards again, and as I did so a

steel chisel crashed on the pavement. I saw no one on the scaffolding.

Once inside the hall I asked the commissionaire if the sculptors were Germans.

"No, sir," he answered. "Austrians from Budapest."

"I knew they were not English," I said.

"How was that, sir?" he asked politely. "From their appearance, I suppose."

"From their clumsiness," I answered. "They nearly dropped a mallet on my head just now."

And as he smiled at this as a mere pleasantry the messenger returned to conduct me within.

My letter of introduction, after I had passed through several hands, secured me admission into the presence of Mr. Clarence Beilby, the Permanent Secretary. He was a man in the fifties with a very high and very bald forehead and gold spectacles. When I entered he was busy at a roll-top desk, and motioned me silently with a wave of his quill pen to a chair, on which for a space I had leisure to examine the contents of the room. In quite a little while he turned.

"Well, Mr.—er."

"Abercromby."

"You wish to see me on important business, I believe."

His manner, if a trifle grandiose, was not unkind.

"Sir, I had a letter from Mr. Burness and I had hoped to see Mr. Horniman."

At the mention of Mr. Burness he smiled.

"Pardon me, Mr. Abercrumley, but who is Mr. Burness? I don't seem to recall——"

"The Member for South-West Kincardineshire," I answered.

"Ah yes!" Mr. Beilby remarked, in a vague tone, that gave me the impression that he was hearing of Mr. Burness, and even of South-West Kincardineshire for the first time. "Well, you know, it is impossible to see Mr. Horniman now. For one thing he never touches anything but the most important matters, and those only after they have passed through my hands."

Knowing I was about to startle him, I said quietly:

"Surely a matter that touches the very existence of the Empire is of sufficient importance to——"

"Is it a plot you have discovered, with spies in it?" he interrupted twiddling his pen between his fingers.

"It is," I said. "But I confess it astonishes me that you should have heard of it already."

Mr. Beilby laughed at my expression of amazement.

"Oh, to tell you the truth people are always bringing us plots they have unearthed. Mostly they are wicked designs of Germany on the integrity of the British Empire. Is yours by any chance a German plot?"

This was horrible. I began to tremble.

"It is," I answered meekly.

Mr. Beilby had once or twice already glanced at the clock, and now yawning slightly he stood up.

"There now you see, Mr. Abbots-Crumley? If we bothered ourselves here about German plots, we should have no time for anything else."

With an effort I drew myself together and protested:

"Sir, but this thing is real and imminent; you dare not dismiss it so!"

Mr. Beilby had touched a bell. Now he turned back to me.

"Come, come, sir! I have not been bad to you, if you only knew it. I've given you the last quarter of an hour before my lunch; and very few who come here with German plots and stories of spies get my length."

In another minute I should see myself being shown out into the street. The case was desperate indeed! At this moment an inner door opened and a gentleman strolled in carrying a newspaper. For a moment I had a wild hope that he might be the Minister himself, and sought confirmation in a glance at his face to identify it with the portraits of the Minister that appeared almost daily in the public press. But the smooth-cut features of the man before me bore no resemblance to the almost cherubic countenance of the great man himself. Hesitating for a moment when he saw a stranger present, and then seeing

that we were on our feet he concluded that the interview was at an end. Mr. Beilby made haste to confirm the impression:

"Good morning, Mr. Abercrumley."

I turned helplessly away towards the clerk who stood holding the door.

"Oh, Beilby, do you see that fool Ashton has been talking again about the German menace. Brought you the report—amuse you at lunch."

Then anger took a hold of me. I wheeled round and drew out the Little Eitel document.

"Sir, if I were permitted to show you the contents of this paper I think I could convince you that though this Ashton, whoever he is, may be a fool, he is not a fool because he talks of the German menace."

The new-comer shot an astonished glance at me and then at Mr. Clarence Beilby. That gentleman with a whimsical smile in which I detected some malice waved his hand towards the other and said:

"This is Mr. Buncombe, Mr. Horniman's private secretary. There is no reason why you should not show him your documents. He is greatly interested in such matters."

And as the private secretary said something under his breath the Permanent Secretary departed for his lunch, and left us alone. Mr. Buncombe took out his watch irresolutely.

"I have an appointment myself to lunch with a friend in five minutes," he said.

I had a suspicion that this was untrue, and went straight to the hearth-rug on which he stood.

"Do you know that to bring that paper here I have many times risked my life?"

The fellow whistled.

"You don't say so!"

"I do say so," was my calm answer. "And if I am not mistaken there were two attempts on my life outside your office this morning."

"Well, well," Mr. Buncombe murmured.

"Oh, I understand, you think me deluded and all that, a man with a monomania, like Ashton, about German spies."

"Not at all," he said. "Only, well—you see, no one has ever tried to murder me outside the Office."

"But that may be because no one thinks it worth while," I answered warmly.

Mr. Buncombe looked at me, nodding his head.

"That's not so bad, you know, not so bad. Well, this paper of yours must be a thing worth seeing, since they were ready to sacrifice your life for it, eh? Let's have a look."

At the first glance Mr. Buncombe let fall on the drawing his countenance expressed utter amazement. Then he smiled.

"I think, sir, you've taken the wrong document from your pocket. This no doubt is your little boy's work. Very creditable, I'm sure."

But when I assured him there was no mistake,

he stared at me almost aghast, and lifted the paper from the table again with a hand that shook.

"There is a hidden meaning in those figures," I said.

I went over them one by one, and he seemed to be intensely interested. I showed him the significance of each figure, that is, so far as I had penetrated; and when I had finished what must he do but draw me into his own private room, which adjoined that of the Permanent Secretary. This was a triumph for me! He had lost his lunch, he remarked, but this was far better than any lunch. Once we were seated he got me to tell him the whole long story of my adventures, from the first night at the Café Rosenkrantz down to my narrow escape from death at the door of the Whitehall Office. He was a most patient listener, seldom interrupting with a question, and making no remark beyond that which was conveyed by an occasional wise nod of the head, at critical junctures in my narrative. I began to see that I had done the perspicacity of the Office an injustice in thought; certainly no man could have desired a more intelligent auditor than I had in Mr. Buncombe.

Long before I had finished I heard Mr. Clarence Beilby, back from lunch, moving about in his room. Mr. Buncombe heard him also, for when I had done he got up, saying it was essential that the Permanent Secretary should be informed at once. So, giving me a cigar, he en-

tered his colleague's room. He was a good while closeted there, and there was considerable interchange of talk between the Permanent and private secretaries, for though what they said was not, of course, audible to me I could distinguish the somewhat harsh staccato tones of Mr. Beilby from the other's soft and rounded utterance.

Eventually the door opened, and Mr. Buncombe brought in Mr. Beilby. I was prepared not to be hard on Mr. Beilby—for I expected him to be rather chastened and crestfallen—Mr. Buncombe had been so decent. Mr. Beilby, however, was far from being crestfallen:

"What's all this nonsense I hear about spies and conspiracies, Mr.——er——?"

"Abercromby is my name," I answered stiffly. "And I've no idea what you mean."

"Tut, tut, sir! Try to disabuse your mind of the hallucination that England is overrun with spies. Where are those pictures you spoke of, Buncombe?"

I took the paper from my pocket and handed it to him in silence. The Permanent Secretary laid it on the table and bent over it.

"This is just a child's drawing. Anyone who could find a scheme for the invasion of the country in this could find one in the story of Jack and the Beanstalk."

It made me almost groan aloud to hear the man! Must I go over it all again? I got really angry.

"Your obstinate blindness, Mr. Beilby, is a proof of these men's acuteness."

He was very angry indeed at this remark of mine, and flung my paper aside with a gesture of disgust.

"Spies!" he cried, thumping the table with his clenched fist. "Don't you know, Mr. Abercromby, that there are *no* spies in England! Didn't you see that the Minister assured the House of Commons the other day that there are *no* spies in this country? How *can* anyone dare to talk of spies after that assurance. Look here"—taking the paper from the floor—"all this spy business and scaremongering, I'll tell you what it means. You, I believe, are outside the political world; you have been abroad for some years, I understand. Well, sir, all this scaremongering and tales of spying is simply a dodge in the political game. I don't say it's an illegitimate dodge, though it often verges on the point of being so, but a dodge it is. No sane man of any political party really believes that there are any spies. No one has any use for spies, except a certain low type of novelist, and a certain low type of journalist, and a certain low type of politician. Now, I put it to you as a sensible man, Mr. Abercromley, why should a level-headed, practical nation like Germany, with whom we are on the happiest terms here, waste public money in spying on her friends?"

Mr. Beilby completed this indignant speech by

mopping his bald and wearied forehead, and wiping his gold spectacles. I looked to Mr. Buncombe to refute this reasoning, but that gentleman's back was to me, and he was engaged in a further study of the sinister drawing. Knowing Mr. Beilby better than I did, probably he knew the uselessness of argument. Nevertheless I appealed to him as the one man there who at least understood.

"What do you say to all this, Mr. Buncombe?"

"Oh," he said, without bothering to turn, "don't ask me: I am for deeds, not words."

It was my own thought! The remark seemed to annoy the Permanent Secretary greatly. He took possession of the drawing in no gentle fashion, and beckoned me over to the table in the window.

"Come, and let me hear what you say the drawing means."

So I went through it all again, explaining as much as I knew carefully, and in the simple words that one uses to a small boy. I had the hope that it would annoy him. I explained the significance of the dead lion, the eagle, the heart and the arrows. I explained that the stone was not a stone, nor the church a church, nor the mountain a mountain, but had to admit I was not sure what they were. I pointed out the missing date of the birthday in the inscription. Both officials listened very carefully, and occasionally exchanged glances;

so I finished not without hope of having made some impression on Mr. Clarence Beilby.

"You see, Beilby," said Buncombe, when I stopped.

The Permanent Secretary took my arm soothingly and began to point out to me how this reading of mine was not the only possible one:

"For instance, as to the missing date, it is quite likely a small boy would not know the date of his father's birthday; I am sure my own boys do not know mine, or indeed any one's except their own. This little boy left the blank for his mother to fill it in. And the heart pierced with arrows, that clearly means that the father is absent; and the three arrows show the number of the family. The eagle which is German certainly shows that it is German hearts that are wounded. Probably there had been a quarrel, a domestic disagreement between husband and wife. Not an uncommon event, even in England; but here it had clearly been a disagreement of a very serious nature. Let us even say that it was a ferocious disagreement and so, probably at the instigation of the now sorrowing mother, the dead lion is inserted to show that all animosity is dead. And that church threatened by the stone on the hill above it, Mr. Abercrumley, shows us that the separation had disastrous results on their religious life, threatening to destroy their faith. And these sheep grazing peacefully around the heart, what else can they stand for but a prophecy of the

tranquil domestic felicity that will ensue upon a reconciliation. There they are all at home, Mr. Abercrumley, all four—father, mother, and two children. See? Sentimental I grant you," Mr. Beilby concluded, "but then every one knows that the Germans are a sentimental, kindly, pious and simple race."

"It is very plausible," I answered, somewhat staggered. "But it was doubtless meant so to be. With my own experiences in memory, however, Mr. Beilby, I know my reading is the right one."

He cast up his eyes, as if beseeching patience for himself.

"Come, come, Mr. Abercrumley!" he expostulated. "Didn't I see further into the thing than you yourself did? Haven't I interpreted figures for which you could find no significance? What, for example, do you find in the four sheep?"

Now it was true I had said nothing of the sheep. I did not like to. Even then I hesitated; and he misunderstood.

"Come, you see you can import into them nothing in harmony with your theory of an invasion," he urged; and he was so pleased at having discovered a weakness, as he supposed, in my interpretation that he recovered his good spirits and became even playful. "Would you by any chance suggest that these animals are wolves in sheep's clothing who have fired the arrows at our Empire's heart?" he laughed.

"I don't think so," I said. "To me the significance is as obvious as to-day I find it to be true in fact."

"What *do* they stand for then?" Mr. Beilby insisted, tapping the paper with his forefinger.

At that my scruples vanished.

"They stand for you, Mr. Beilby, and for all who are like you. For those who, set to defend the Empire, eat of the fat pastures of office, and bleat of peace to the Empire's enemies. Ay, and the sheep stand for me, too, and for all my fellow countrymen who put you where you are, and put our trust in you!"

After that there was silence in the room, a silence that could be felt.

"Have you any doubt now?" asked Mr. Buncombe softly.

"None," said Mr. Beilby.

They both went out of the room, and I wondered! My speech had been rather direct, not to say rude. I was not unaware of that, but my reception had rattled me; and the self-sufficient officialdom that could so blandly expect me to surrender my facts, which were founded on positive, bitter, and personal experiences, the moment they advanced theories and assumptions which had no basis at all—that was a strain under which my natural inclination for politeness perished. Politeness! When the glamour of an official position renders men more stupid than Nature made them politeness ceases to be a virtue for

honest men. I could indeed congratulate myself on the good effect of my bluntness since it seemed to have carried conviction to Mr. Beilby, whose answer to his colleague's question was in the negative.

So I waited in patience, hopeful that at last my ally Mr. Buncombe had gone to place the matter before his chief. In the interval I helped myself to one of the private secretary's excellent cigars, and studied anew that lower and much more enigmatical half of little Eitel's paper. I felt sure that if I could have read the combined figures and symbols it would have carried conviction even to Mr. Beilby. It was maddening that I could not, for I felt sure that their secret was one of those obvious secrets that lie on the surface, and suddenly, the right angle of view being taken, blaze into intelligibility. Their disguise, I felt, was simplicity, not complexity; their secret was wrapped up in obviousness, not in obscurity.

In the middle of all this thought the door reopened and Messrs. Beilby and Buncombe reappeared. Not alone. They were accompanied by a policeman. As I had more than half expected the Minister himself, I was astonished to a degree.

"This is the gentleman," said Mr. Beilby.

The policeman advanced upon me. I rose in indignation:

"What is the meaning of this?" I asked.

"Now, now!" said the officer, laying a hand on my arm.

"Sir," I said, addressing Mr. Beilby, "there is no need for you to call in force to expel me from this place. Now that I perceive you to be beyond reach of enlightenment from merely human sources I will leave this place gladly enough."

"It is no question of expulsion, Mr. Abercrumley," Mr. Buncombe interrupted. "We cannot allow you to wander abroad possessed of such delusions. But your friends will be communicated with, and you will be kindly treated meanwhile." Mr. Beilby nodded his agreement. "And," he added soothingly, "we are not quite sure that your present unhappy condition of mind is not of a temporary character."

"You think I am insane!" I gasped.

"Not insane," said the Permanent Secretary, "but, well—in a highly imaginative condition—mentally upset—your severe studies abroad, you know."

Then I threw up the sponge. In this world there are many things hard of proof but easy enough of belief. Open as I am, both by profession and inclination, to the influence of scientific pursuits, I have never ranked myself among those materialists who demand a mathematical proof as an antecedent to all intellectual convictions. There are too many things that lie outside the region in which logical proof is possible; and

one of the things incapable of proof is one's own sanity.

"At least," I said, "I may take the paper with me," for it was now in Mr. Buncombe's fat hands.

He glanced at his colleague.

"I am not sure he ought to have it: it's simply food for his delusion," Mr. Buncombe talked as if I were not present.

"Surely," I cried in sarcasm, "a lunatic need not be robbed."

So they let me have it.

As I was led to the door both secretaries watched me with sympathetic eyes.

"Poor young fellow, mad as a hatter!" said Mr. Buncombe under his breath.

"But quite harmless," added Mr. Beilby, kind to the last.

With the policeman I entered a taxi-cab outside, in as helpless a rage as I have ever known. Vaguely I knew that at this time a good deal was being said about the German menace. One lighted on the thing in the newspapers. One met comments on it in the German papers. It was said to be the fad of one or two journalists. Had these stood alone they might have been disregarded; but in politics a good definite cry is an asset of value, and the German peril had, no doubt, its use for the politician, as well as for the journalist. These two, however, did not stand alone: there were others, publicists and soldiers

with no axes of their own to grind, whose grave voices were raised in repeated warnings; and though we cannot say that these were unheard, yet they were unheeded by the purblind politician. The matter, however, was not without its uses—several young and rising politicians helped themselves up into notoriety, if not fame, by the bitterness of their comments on the warnings uttered by men grown grey in England's service before these "young and rising" politicians were born. Like the Beilbys and the Buncombes, the only teaching to which they were open was the teaching of events.

My stay at the police station was not destined to be a long one. On my arrival, I was placed in a room in which I knew I should be kept in observation from a little window that opened on to another room. Eventually two gentlemen, whose profession was obvious to my eye, entered.

"Mr. Abbotbrumley?" the elder addressed me in an interrogative tone.

"Abercromby," I answered, bowing.

The inspector coughed and said:

"My information is that the gentleman is never sure of his name, though he always gives one with a *h'A* in it."

The two doctors nodded, and the first continued:

"Well, Mr. Abercromby, I am told your nerves are a little unstrung, run down a bit, eh! so that

you had the idea that there are German spies chasing you all up and down England?"

This made me laugh; it seemed too conclusive for disproof.

"Aren't you in danger of forgetting the distinction between *post hoc* and *propter hoc*?" I asked.

"H'm!" the second chipped in. "Know some Latin, eh?"

"Thinks he's been to Berlin too," said the police inspector in a stage whisper to the police surgeon.

To me the connection between knowing some Latin and having been to Berlin was obscure.

"I know little Latin, but I have some Logic," I answered.

Both men pricked up their ears at the mention of Logic; and I expected they would: lunatics, especially Scotch ones, are strong on Logic.

"Come," said the elder, fingering his beard, "this is interesting. How would you express it?"

"Very simply, sir," I answered. "Are my nerves the cause of the spies, or the spies the cause of my nerves? Mind you, I do not admit to more than a certain cerebral excitement at unexpected revelations of official incapacity in a Government department." The elder man with the beard smiled at this last. "Of course," I continued, "I am aware it is my present mental condition you are concerned with, and not with the

causes, which may be either real or imaginary, that have induced it."

"Thank you," the police surgeon replied dryly. "It's in my experience unusual in such cases to be brought to the point by the person I examine. But, since we have been so far unconventional, I may as well remind you that a person in a hallucinated condition may be firmly convinced that he is a reincarnation of Julius Cæsar, and at the same time be an excellent logician, and a man of common sense on all other points of life."

"Precisely, till you light on his hallucination."

The examiner-in-chief nodded assent, fingering his watch-chain and observing me narrowly.

"By the way, what is your hallucination? I haven't been told."

"Isn't that for the inspector to say?" I asked. "The prisoner is not usually expected to charge himself."

"My information is that he has the delusion that there is a German invasion of England planned," the inspector said.

The civilian doctor emitted a whistle of astonishment! Both were silent for a little, and then the other turned to me grimly.

"Well, what do you say to that?"

"This—Lord Heritage has said it too. Have you examined him? Professor William Simpson said it too; but he is still allowed to lecture. General Arthur Wetherby has said it; but you haven't

signed his certificate: Bernard Bushford, the Socialist, has written it, yet he is still, I believe, at large. Why should the Whitehall Office single out me for this examination into my mental condition, for saying what all these men have said?"

The bearded medico grinned, and I believe winked at his brother.

"I have no idea," he said slowly, "unless it was because you went to the Whitehall Office to say it."

The other roared at this, slapping his leg, and the inspector gaped in bewilderment.

"Then," I cried in relief, "you won't consign me for further examination and observation."

"How can I," he replied, "when I myself share in your hallucination?"

The police surgeon carried me off with him to his house. We had a long talk. I stayed the night there, earning my bed with the story, or as much of it as I thought it prudent to give, of my adventures. When I had finished he remarked that I had been wise not to tell them all that at the police station, or he would have been inclined to authorise my detention.

At his urgent advice I spent the following day quietly in his house, and when I left Charing Cross by the 9.45 for Dover, it was as a timid and spectacled young clergyman.

In this character I was a source of gaiety to a

kilted soldier, who insisted on calling me "Specky," and to a sailor who addressed me as "Sky," and who wished to know if I was on my way to make an attempt at the cross-Channel Swim.

CHAPTER XI

THERE were two points that vastly concerned me. The enemy meditated a sudden stroke. This might have been known not from one but from a hundred indications, had not our own officialdom worked unceasingly to keep the public slumber undisturbed. So the two points that interested me were simply those of *the time* and *the place*. The first I regarded as beyond hope of immediate discovery: I could read no indication of it in the document I possessed. As to the second, there was no more than the vague suggestion, as I read it, that the descent would be made somewhere on the southeast coast. This was all I knew when I determined on my journey to Dover, and it was this fact alone that sent me there. I had the idea, of pottering about for a few days with my eyes open.

For a couple of days the old Cinque Port afforded me plenty of scope in the way of exploration, but, of anything that bore upon my hunt, not a shadow. I pondered over that little Eitel drawing at all hours, but could extract no

further light. On the third day as I was at breakfast in my hotel, and wondering whether I had better move on round the coast towards Walmer and Deal, the waiter, who had begun to manifest an interest in my doings and welfare, spoke—how little he knew it—the fateful word that put me definitely on the right track. Observing, I suppose, my moodiness, he catalogued on his fingers the various places to which I had been, and then proceeded to suggest others further afield; there were, for instance, the Warren and Shakespeare's Cliff. Rather mechanically, I am afraid, I thanked him; for to tell the truth at the moment I was not listening to him; my ear had caught the talk of two men sitting at my table. One, in naval uniform, but of what rank my knowledge of the navy was too insufficient to tell me, was a young man of perhaps twenty-six, and the other, an older man, was, though in a flannel suit, almost obviously either a soldier or a sailor. As they sat opposite to me it was impossible for me not to hear what was said. The first thing to catch my attention had been the mention of Sir Arthur Wetherby's name, and I found they were discussing him in connection with one of his most recent declarations on the German menace. The elder man was inclined to regret these utterances of the retired soldier, which were being warmly praised by the naval officer. My interest in the talk becoming manifest to them, and they, not caring possibly to discuss

the personalities of the Service before the outside world, as represented by myself, slid their conversation on to the subject of invasion in the abstract. The sailor stoutly maintained, though he seemed to regret the fact, that no Continental power dared attempt a landing in England, while the other thought it was quite a likely subject for the dreams of a strong military nation, who understood little of what sea-power meant. In my character of curate I ventured with much trepidation to put in an oar. One of them had just asked for a suggestion as to where the landing could be made.

"Surely," I said, "it would be where almost every one of the many invasions have been made, in Kent. Cæsar landed in Kent; so did Hengist and Horsa, and Hardicanute. Duke William practically did so, and Napoleon wanted to."

At first, I fancy, they were inclined to resent my intrusion into the talk; but the sailor, perhaps confounding, as many still do, a clergyman with a scholar and thereby crediting me with some historical knowledge, welcomed my intervention.

"Exactly!" he cried. "It has been done time and again; and more often successfully than not."

"Well, anyhow, they all destroyed the England of the time," I said.

The soldier looked queerly at me.

"Does that apply to the landing you omitted to mention?"

"Which was that?" I asked.

"St. Augustine's."

We all laughed at that, but I think I had the best laugh. A long talk ensued on the subject, but, as so often happens in argument, with no other result than to stiffen each of us in his previous judgment.

It was only after they had gone that the waiter's words came back to me. He had mentioned the view that could be had from Shakespeare's Cliff, and the quaint interest there was in the Warren. The nearest road to the Cliff, from which I was told I should have an extensive view of the coast towards Dungeness, lay by the old road round by the Harbour Station. It was a sunny day, with a breeze blowing in by the sea, and the road as it mounted up, past a cluster of coast-guard cottages that stood out white and conspicuous against the green hill-side, led me on to the bold headland that approached Shakespeare's Cliff. That Cliff I soon saw, high and clear-cut in outline, with silvery foam beating intermittently at its base.

When I eventually reached the tableland which forms its top I was at an altitude from which, truly enough, a long stretch of coastline could be seen. To the west was Folkestone on its hills, and beyond, a huge curve of bay with Sandgate and Hythe, and beyond them again Dymchurch, and, creeping into view like a cloudy, low wall thrust far out to sea, lay Dungeness, a smudge

on the far horizon. Enamoured with the panoramic display, I lay down on the sunburnt turf to take my fill of it. Immediately below me was the railway that connected Dover and Folkestone, running under the white chalk cliffs. Farther inland, the long range of semicircular Downs guarded the few miles of flat green fields, studded here and there with houses and trees, the hinterland of Folkestone and Sandgate.

Due south the French coast was clearly visible, more visible indeed than the filmy grey streak that was Dungeness; and I thought I could pick out the high point of Cape Gris-nez. Indeed, it was in fact much nearer, and so, as I looked out over that water that seems so narrow whenever the French coast is visible, I fell to thinking of what immense value the Channel is in the defences of England. Narrow as it was it had not been too narrow. And I mused on the last attempt that had been made, and saw in my mind's eye that familiar figure in the cocked hat, the green coat, the top boots and white kerseymere breeches, the little Corporal of Corsica, standing above Boulogne, with a vast encamped army behind him, his dark saturnine eyes turned gloomily seawards. Napoleon, as Bourienne, his biographer, tells us, was no sailor and hated the sea. Well, that was likely enough; but, as I lay there and looked over the silver strip, I seemed to understand that his hate might spring from another cause than want of seamanship.

By a rough zigzag path I made my way down, and came into the broken stretch of seashore, all hummocks and brambles and gorse, that extends right up to Folkestone, and is called the Warren. It is a quaint wilderness of little hills, well above sea level, and yet well sheltered from the cold wind of the east and the north, and, with the springy grass, mighty pleasant to walk on. After I had traversed a mile so, I came on an old Martello tower standing on a sloping bank, and there I rested for a while. By and by a man came wandering up, and we fell into talk. He was, he informed me, engaged in making a collection of wild flowers, for which that place was famed. This foreshore was a great hunting ground also for rare insects, especially for grasshoppers, many rare species of which were fairly common in that place. He had a friend who made the collection the work of his life; but he himself was getting old, and preferred to collect something that did not run away from him.

Another acquaintance of his, a young bank clerk, was an authority on sea-shells, of which there were many in the neighbourhood—even fossil shells were to be found frequently there. A very interesting pursuit, he was informed, was the collecting of sea-shells, conchology, the young man called it; but as it involved the risk of damp feet, and so on, he himself clove to his flowers. Selecting a yellow one from the bunch in his hand, he showed it to me as being one which

in my character of clergyman ought to be of special interest to me, the tansy he called it. The name he said was from the Greek word that meant immortality. Could I write down in his note book what the Greek word was? Here was an unexpected stroke at my disguise! Hitherto I had not had the slightest difficulty in maintaining my assumed character. A connected story to account for myself I had of course prepared, but I had not gone the length of acquiring a knowledge of the Greek language as a proof of my *bona fides*. It was truly amusing that the one person, Joseph Dewinski excepted, to come nearest to the penetration of my disguise should be a silly, old-young man who collected wild flowers.

I knew no Greek, but then neither did the man himself! So out of my remembrance of the appearance of Greek characters I constructed a word which, I assured him, was the one desired. After looking at it with interest and contentment he was profuse in his thanks, lifted his hat, and went on his flowery way. Dear peaceful England! I should have liked to pluck at his sleeve, and at that of the collector of ants and grasshoppers, and at that of the young bank clerk who was an authority on shells, and have pointed out that Martello tower to them, which stood in the midst of their innocent preoccupations, and yet told them nothing of their forefathers' fear a hundred years ago. So I thought, as I turned over

the pages of a guide-book to the coast of Kent that I had procured. And then I came on this passage, which showed me that others, whose occupations were not so futile, could be no less futile in their outlook. This was the passage, and its reference is to the very coast defences I had that morning passed:

"The future perhaps will let all the fortifications go to ruin, being able at Hague, and other courts, to settle its national quarrels quite as easily as men sue and defend themselves in other Law Courts." *

There is fatuity if you like! "Quite as easily"? Surely not! An individual has to accept the decision of the Law Courts of the nation to which he belongs because it has power over his goods and his person; but who or what can enforce upon a nation any judgment it does not agree to accept? For the individual who is an offender the policeman suffices; but for the nation who is an offender there is ultimately only the soldier, and even he does not always suffice.

As I lay there comfortably in the warm sun, my thoughts were punctuated by the far-away tap-tap-tapping of a machine gun, which seemed to show that somewhere along that coast there were men who shared my convictions. Across the water too, at intervals, there came the *boom boom* of a big gun from the direction of Lydd

* "The Kent Coast," by A. D. Lucas, p. 276. Fisher Unwin.

and the Dungeness, and that, also, was a comforting sound, as I thought of the paper that lay against my breast, and of the Whitehall Office, while the grasshopper chirped near me in the heat, and a little rabbit loped out of the bramble cover and sat up on his haunches to regard the world.

I must have been dozing for a minute. Anyway I recall that, in a half-conscious fashion, my thoughts were wandering over the way I had come that morning, and I wondered vaguely why that headland on my left got its connection with Shakespeare. Then the thought of Shakespeare led on to the thought of Germany, and the far away *boom, boom*, of the gun on my right also suggested Germany, so that I seemed to have my thoughts forced into one channel, both by the silent cliff and the active guns. For a moment I wondered if I were actually going mad, the victim of an obsession. I opened my eyes and there was the rabbit still poised on its haunches—so my thoughts had been no more than a flash in time. The little animal was watching me intently. Perhaps to him the mere lifting of my eyelids had been alarming.

Then the thing burst on me all at once! I sat up and tore little Eitel's drawing from my pocket, while the rabbit took a header into cover. His mission had been accomplished! Of course that little bust was Shakespeare; and the targets stood for Hythe, and both marked the limits within

which a landing could take place. I was on the very ground itself.

The whole thing became as clear as daylight to me as I scanned the drawing. These things which Mr. Clarence Beilby had called the poor little fellow's pathetic toys! The rabbit was the Warren in which I was seated. The locomotive stood for the railway which was behind me, and the lines were the railway system, and showed that there was a branch railway to the beach at Sandgate. I never had been yet to any of these places, but I now knew their positions as well as if I had. Hastily I seized my guide-book with its map of the district. Yes; there were the railways, and the church stood for Canterbury, and, away beyond, the stone was really an oyster, and stood for Whitstable, the "II" stood for, I guessed, another landing with which "I" would there link up. Beyond the railway line was the high semicircle of the downs, which would form an inner camp and would, once held, make the landing of a million men easy and safe. At all events that is how it struck me, though I knew, of course, nothing of military operations.

Next I turned my attention on the series of figures underneath the main drawing. It was long before I could make anything of them, and in the end I was doubtful. However, what I seemed to make out was this: the drawings on the top of each of the series indicated a place. There was the repetition of the two targets al-

ready used as a symbol for Hythe, on account of its musketry school, to show me that. In each in the series a number followed, and of these I could make nothing. Then there followed another drawing, and to each of these I turned my thoughts. These were, as I made them out, drawings of a violin, a pair of scissors and a pair of eyeglasses. Set together in a list they at once, I think, become suggestive. I was hot on the scent now; far too keen and excited to linger where I was. Putting away my papers I made off rapidly along the foreshore in the direction of Folkestone, anxious to verify my theory that there were in Folkestone a hairdresser, in Hythe a jeweller, and in Sandgate a musician, who could tell me as much of little Eitel's secret as any other three men in England, though, I suspected, I should not find them to be men of English birth.

Well, I had a nice little surprise for them once they were found; for I had an idea as to how I might find them, which I put into practice when I entered Folkestone. At the post office in the Sandgate road I got possession of a local directory which, to my satisfaction, proved to be a well-arranged publication, giving not only the inhabitants in alphabetic order but also a classified list of trades and occupations. It also did the same thing for the neighbouring Sandgate and Hythe. Turning its pages I came on the list of hairdressers. There were about forty classified as

Hairdressers and Perfumers. Now if I found the street number of any one of them to correspond with any number on the Eitel column I might be certain I had found my man! The numbers under what I took to be Folkestone on my paper were 15 and 27. Was there any hairdresser in the directory with a shop, in any street, at either of these numbers. Yes, there was! This was the entry:

Black, F., 15 East Cliff Street.

There was no entry that gave 27 as an address, so the second number must refer to something else. However, for verification I tried the directory for a Sandgate violinist who had a shop in number 3 of some street. I was right on the track now.

Ahn, R., 3 Seabrook Road.

This was beyond the range of mere coincidence, and it did not need the further proof of ascertaining that at Hythe an optician and watchmaker assisted in throwing dust in the national eyes while he fitted glasses on the public nose:

Daubmann, 15 West Parade.

When I had taken note of these entries I went to have a look at the hairdresser, whose shop I found situated in the old part of the town, down by the narrow High Street, facing the harbour. It was not a high-class establishment, that of F. Black, and I should judge that disinfectants would be a more suitable side line to the business than perfumery. Still since clergymen,

especially of the Church of England, are, like babes, unaccountable and irresponsible in their actions and tastes I thought it would excite no surprise if I selected such a hairdresser. So I entered. The proprietor was engaged in stropping a razor, and a youth was lathering a customer's chin. A queer little shiver ran through me, for Mr. Black whose back was towards me did not look round on my entry, but caught my eye in the large mirror in front of him. He was a bulky man with a large rather featureless countenance; but his eyes were noteworthy. It was not the casual look at a new client he gave me, rather a sort of alert, stealthy examination. For the briefest duration we looked at each other so, and then he turned round bowing me to a chair.

I soon discovered that Mr. Black while an expert hairdresser was somewhat inexpert in his use of the English language, and his mistakes were of a kind that led me to believe not that his education had suffered neglect, but that, if left to himself, he would spell the homely English name of Black as Schwarz. When he had finished with my hair he was eager to complete matters with a shave. But I confess that I did not fancy a shave in that queer place. To have that quiet fat figured sleek ruffian playing about my throat with a razor! And suppose Dewinski, or some of his gang who knew me, were to enter—a not impossible chance, since we must suppose they kept in touch with all their agents—what would

they not give to find me huddled up in a sheet and with my head thrown back so conveniently!

I was extraordinarily glad to get out of that dark shop into the fresh air again.

After I had visited both Mr. Ahn's establishment at Sandgate and Mr. Daubmann's at Hythe, I took some lunch in Folkestone at a restaurant in the Sandgate Road, and then sat pondering over what possible plan of action was open to me. Both shops were situated so as to command from the rooms above an extensive view of the Channel. I had, however, merely inspected them from the outside and marked their position; for it might have been fatal had Messrs. Black, Ahn and Daubmann come, by some odd chance, to know that each had that day a visit from a clergyman. For long I sat, full of consideration. What could I *do*? Go to the police and denounce these three respectable local tradesmen? Suppose I did, what proofs had I to advance? Merely the same childish drawings that had failed so lamentably at the Whitehall Office. Could I reasonably expect a higher degree of intelligence in any local officials? True, there was the coincidence of their numbers and occupations on that paper with what I had found in the local directory. Would that be enough?

I sickened as I thought of the hopelessness of it all! Very likely they would consider me a wandering lunatic who had manufactured little Eitel's drawings himself; and I could see them

in the police office, with innocent cunning, asking me to draw a sheep for them, and a rabbit, and an engine, and a sand castle, and a church so as to detect my guileless hand before they consigned me to medical supervision, and advertised for my friends! At the best, what was the word of a stranger worth against three respectable local tradesmen whom they knew, and who, no doubt, paid rent, rates and taxes with due punctuality? The self-evident fact was that I had got hold of nothing tangible in the way of proof, and until I did I could look in vain for any outside help.

As I sat over my coffee, with the paper before me, more and more I came to admire the dexterity of that childish concealment which seemed to tell all, and which told nothing. It was an extraordinarily black moment for me. A feeling of deep depression flooded my mind in that deserted café. Outside on the pavement the miscellaneous throng of people in their bright summer clothes passed and repassed; snatches of laughter, and greetings of friends, came to my ears, a symbol of England they were, of England innocent, and asleep, oblivious, while in their very midst, harboured, and sometimes even honoured, there moved this vile, slimy, hidden treachery that laboured ceaselessly with a thousand active fingers, in pothouse and palace, for England's destruction.

I wandered out on the Leas, amid the gay

butterflies that were listening to the military band, which that afternoon was playing on the glorious headland. In the midst of all that kaleidoscope of colour and buzz of talk I had a sense of being separate and aloof. The smooth bituminous paths that ran along the greensward and encircled the bandstand seemed to be but the thin, hardened surface that hid the burning lava on which a symbolic England moved unconcernedly. I had been through this surface, and knew what lay beneath. It made me feel alien to the throng, like the Ancient Mariner amongst the wedding-guests. If only, I thought, there were some one who would work with me, one who would talk it over, so that in the conflict of thought with thought we might hammer out something practical, unearth some proof, tangible, visible, demonstrable. Like the Lady of Shalott, I was sick of shadows.

Presently I had left behind people and bandstand and bathchairs, and found myself at the Sandgate end of the Leas, beside a field, in which a cricket match, between, apparently, a girls' and a boys' school was going on. The girls were batting and doing well, to judge from the applause that came from the rest of the blue and green team on the boundary line. But perhaps they were, after all, like myself not doing very well, and in sore need of encouragement, as I was at that moment. No one believed in me—at least only a girl who had been through part of the

thing with me. There was something that comforted me in the thought, and I resolved to supplement the wire I had sent Miss Thompson that morning with a fuller letter which would be useful in the public interest, if anything happened to me in the next few days.

Coming on the edge of the cliff I sat down in that quiet place and tried my luck with Eitel's drawing again; but I had no luck at all, and soon laid it aside, baffled. I don't know how long I sat there brooding. Far below were the red-topped houses, and under my eyes the noble curve of bay that ran to Hythe. The cricket match had ended, and the girls in blue and green had trooped down the steep slanting path to their school again. The strains of the distant band no longer came fitfully on the breeze to my inattentive ear. When I got up I had come to the conclusion that I would, on the morrow, seek out Ashton, the member who had made the row in the House, and lay my story before him. If I failed there I would make an attempt to enlist Sir Arthur Wetherby who, as a soldier, might make more out of Eitel than I had done. If I failed with him also I would be unlikely to succeed elsewhere, and would wash my hands of the whole business.

The train I took at Shorncliffe station landed me back in Dover in good time for the dinner to which I brought very little appetite.

In the smoking-room afterwards I sat out all

the guests, smoking many moody pipes. It must have been about eleven o'clock, as I was thinking of retiring, when the door opened, and the two officers, my acquaintances of the morning, entered. Both seemed tired, and apparently only entered for a last pipe, and the night-cap which the waiter presently brought them. A nod passed between us, and as I got up they dropped into the deep lounge chairs, the one with a sigh, the other with a half-stifled yawn. The sailor had picked up a newspaper, and I was crossing the room to go to bed as he called his friend's attention to something in it that had caught his eyes:

"Here's a dashed funny thing, Mac," he said with some animation. "Listen to this advertisement: 'Whitehall Office. If Mr. Abercrumley will call again with his drawing he can be assured of a very different reception.' What an extraordinary thing!"

The other man laughed. I stopped dead by the door.

"Usual blunder, I suppose," said the soldier, taking the paper and scanning it. "A very unusual advertisement from a Government department."

"Something damned funny behind that Mr. Abercrumley, no doubt," the other concluded, turning to his drink.

Letting the door go, I came back into the room, and they did not seem to hear my steps on the thick red carpet.

"There is," I said. "You are quite right. There is something damned funny behind that Mr. Abercrumley."

They turned round, staring at me, and I pushed a chair up to them and sat down.

"If you come to that," I said, raising my voice, "it is damned funny that they should call him Mr. Abercrumley."

I think they were terribly shocked. Like all laymen they, no doubt, were very particular about clergymen's language.

"Who are you, anyway?" asked the sailor, quick and snappy. "Are you a clergyman?"

"Not I!" I answered stoutly.

"Then who the devil are you, and what——?"

"Mr. Abercrumley." I interrupted the rising storm.

Both stared at me in silence. It was the soldier who first found words.

"You look rather white. Do you want to tell us about it?" He got up and touched the bell. "So they want you at the Whitehall Office, Mr. Abercrumley," he continued.

I took the lead thus given me and nodded.

"It is about that matter we were discussing this morning. The matter of invasion."

"One minute." He stopped me as the waiter came in. "I think we'll say brandy for you—do you more good." And on my assenting the man placed the glass on a little table to my hand. This soldier, if he was a soldier, assumed control

of things in a rather remarkable manner. "Now," he said, "fire away, we're listening."

"I ought to begin by saying that my name is not Abercrumley at all, but Abercromby. You'll think that funny, but I did give my real name to them, only they persisted in calling me Abercrumley, or anything that began with an 'A,' and had four syllables in it. Of course I know it is quite safe to tell you my story. Your uniform——"

"I beg pardon," the lieutenant intervened: "This,"—he indicated his friend with his pipe—"is Captain Mackenzie. I am Lieutenant Deverill of the *Nightjar*."

It took me a good hour to tell my story, but it did not exhaust their patience; neither did they interrupt me by a single question. Sometimes an eyebrow would be lifted, but whether in incredulity or astonishment I could not say. Sometimes they exchanged a glance; and when I came to that part of my tale which concerned Mr. Beilby and Mr. Buncombe, and expected a smile, they remained grave and unmoved. Obsessed as I then was, with the shadowy nature of the evidence, and with my perpetual failure to secure any tangible and convincing proof, I laid great stress on the relentless and unceasing nature of the attempts made to recover the little Eitel document, and on the impossibility of believing it to be the innocent and pathetic thing Mr. Beilby made out, and finished by telling them the result of my investigations in the Folkestone

directory that day. I think I put the thing lucidly and calmly; but all the same when, at the end, Captain Mackenzie asked if they might see the little Eitel drawing, I was afraid that the apparently guileless innocence of that childish production would, once more, undo the effect of my story.

Mackenzie's hand trembled as he put it out to take possession of the paper, and I, being now as sensitive as a schoolgirl to any laughter with a hint of ridicule in it, shot a glance at his face to see if it reflected a corresponding emotion.

"This is priceless," murmured the lieutenant, scanning the paper.

It was not half-suppressed amusement I read on the soldier's face. He was pale, and it was no flicker of ribald mirth I saw—the eyes of the men were like burning flames. A thrill ran down my spine, and a far-away suspicion was born in my brain. But he had the paper now, and was examining it closely, in silence. Feeling in my pocket for the Browning pistol, I quietly freed the safety catch and held it there, ready for use.

Presently he lifted his eyes to me.

"Mr. Abercromby," he said quietly, "you may not know the Greek for 'immortality,' but your knowledge of German may yet make you immortal in English history."

He waved a hand at my astonishment, and explained:

"This morning your interest in the subject

of invasion was very marked. It had evidently occupied your mind much more as a definite and concrete project than as an abstract possibility. Of course I see now why that was so; but this morning I did not know, and you raised suspicion."

"Very easily done," the lieutenant interjected. "It's his lay, you know—a Secret Service bloke."

"I've had warning that something was afoot," Mackenzie went on. "But we never could lay a finger on anything. Well, from your talk and other things, the pistol you carry in your pocket for instance, I guessed you were no clergyman. To make sure I had that interesting talk with you this afternoon in the Warren, and got you, if you remember, to write down a word which, if you were what you affected to be, you must know."

"Pardon the interruption," I broke in, "which is to express my admiration for the English Secret Service. If a knowledge of the Greek language is an essential qualification it must be a remarkably efficient organization."

"Oh that!" Deverill laughed. "Mac started learning Greek at his preparatory school, natural passion for it. If he'd not been what he is he would have been another Gilbert Murray."

"Everything comes in handy with us," the soldier continued. "Well, Mr. Abercromby, after I had ascertained you were no clergyman I kept an eye on you all the afternoon——"

"What!" I cried. "You followed me and——!"

"Not in a way that disconcerted you, I hope, and it was very useful to me to mark the places you visited."

"Black's and Ahn's and Daubmann's?"

"Precisely. I couldn't quite make out, though, why you merely looked at these places and did not enter."

"That left you guessing, Mac," said the sailor, raillery in his voice.

The other nodded.

"Thought Mr. Abercromby might be a spy sent to spy on the spies," he said. "But I should have known all about *him* to-night."

"To-night!" I cried, incredulous.

"To-night you were to have been quietly arrested by the police on the pretence of being an absconding solicitor. Then you would have had to endure a thorough rummage into your antecedents and present possessions. We should have found this drawing."

"And made nothing of it," I said grimly.

Mackenzie's eyes glimmered at me.

"I should have made just what I make of it now," he replied, folding and pocketing the drawing.

"You can read it?" I cried. "Nothing in it puzzles you?"

"Oh yes, one thing does fairly beat me."

He began to walk up and down, lost in

thought. The lieutenant sat watching him, while I, inwardly incredulous as to the possibility of his being able to decipher my document unassisted by my story, sipped from my glass. Outside I heard a motor slide up to the hotel door, the engine throbbing. Mackenzie stopped his perambulation, listening. Then he turned towards us and said:

"Deverill, go and take off that uniform. You will find some clothes in my room."

The sailor got up quickly, and at the door they talked quietly together before Deverill left the room. Captain Mackenzie came over and stood before me. I slipped my hand on to the butt end of my pistol again, not knowing what next to expect or fear.

"Abercromby," he said, "there is something very strange about this affair."

Now I liked the way in which he dropped the formal prefix to my name: it reassured me, and somehow told me that he accepted me as a comrade. I knew he was all right and withdrew my hand, in some shame, from my pocket.

"Of course," I said judicially, "the details are difficult to read, but the general idea is as clear as daylight."

"Is it?" he asked with a sigh. "To me it is the separate details that are clear, but the general idea——" he turned away—"is black, black as midnight."

"Surely," I began.

But he wheeled round on me, intensely moved.

"It was in Germany you got that paper, wasn't it?"

"Yes," I faltered, wondering if he had gone suddenly mad.

"And these were Germans you hunted out this afternoon!"

"One was, I'll swear to that, though he is called Black."

"And these were Germans who hunted you to Scotland?"

"Yes—well, I can't swear to it. One may have been a Jew." By this time I was dazed.

"You will wonder why I ask you these things," he said with a bewildered air himself. "But this drawing though it corroborates you in its appearance, in its love of detail, and the evident passion of its authors for a nicely arranged and dated programme of operations, yet contradicts you in the one essential fact."

"For Heaven's sake say what it is," I cried.

Captain Mackenzie took out the little Eitel drawing:

"This," he said quietly, "is not a German scheme for the invasion of England, but a French one."

"French!" I cried. "French! Are you mad?"

"At least," he said, "it is the programme of

an invasion *from* the French coast, from Calais, to be precise."

"Calais!" I stammered, "I don't see—how Germany can——"

"That's it!" said Mackenzie. "Neither do I." And he began to pace the room again.

Nothing more was said till Deverill reappeared in mufti.

"I sent the policeman home," said the lieutenant, smiling at me.

Mackenzie threw off his abstraction, becoming all at once the man of action.

"Car ready?" he asked.

"At the door," replied Deverill.

"Now, Abercromby," he said turning to me. It was indeed a night of surprises!

"Well?" I said weakly.

"That pistol of yours loaded?"

"It is," I answered, wondering what came next.

"Then bring it with you. I fancy we may be in for a rough time."

CHAPTER XII

WHILE the car was humming up the long hill out of Dover no word passed between us three. Captain Mackenzie leaned back, preoccupied with his thoughts. It was too dark to see anything more than the arcs of our head-lights on the road, and the sharply silhouetted backs of Deverill and the chauffeur in front. But when at last we topped the downs, and were nearing the Royal Oak Inn, which is almost half-way between the two towns of Dover and Folkestone, he spoke.

"Do you think Henschel was killed?"

The question surprised me. Not only as regards its unexpectedness but also in the peculiar emphasis he laid on the proper name.

"Not a doubt of it," I answered. And then, as he was silent, I began to comment on the man's bravery, remarking on the contrast it presented to his disloyalty to his country.

"How do you mean—disloyalty?"

"Well," I answered, "I suppose one must regard him as disloyal to his country. I suppose he was so for reward, which made him doubly

base; yet if bravery is a virtue he was a good man; and no man could have died more heroically for his country than Henschel died for England."

He fell silent again, like a man considering his next remark. Then I felt his hand laid on my arm.

"He died for his own country," he said. "Be sure of that."

"Henschel!" I said, astonished.

"His name was not Henschel. I cannot tell you his name, though it is a good name, but he—well, never mind that—I wish the world could know." His words trailed off so that the last of them appeared as if he were speaking his thoughts aloud.

So we bowled along the Dover road, high above the sea. From away on the French coast came the brilliant white flashes of the Gris-nez lighthouse. Down below were the lights of the ships dotting the surface of the channel, and ahead of us, as the car began to take the long slope that runs into Folkestone—the citizens of which had long gone to bed—was the soft glow that came from the innumerable lamps of the empty streets.

We did not enter Folkestone itself, but made a circle round the back of the town by a road that ran under the Downs, and brought us out at Cheriton, close to Shorncliffe railway station. There Mackenzie and Deverill left the car and were away about half an hour, returning laden with implements of some sort which they kept

carefully covered. Then we went on, along a narrow road, and down a steep hill till we came into Sandgate. Here we stopped, and, sitting in the car while the sailor busied himself getting the instruments and implements out, Mackenzie gave me a paper; throwing a light on it from a hand torch, he explained what he wanted me to do. The paper had certain figures on it, and it was easy for me to see that they were those so familiar to me on the little Eitel document.

"I want you," said Mackenzie, "to keep beside me and be ready to verify the figures. And in your other hand keep your gun ready, and with your other eye keep a sharp look out and tell me what you see."

We left the car and went along the road that runs by the sea. Deverill carried some rods about five feet long, painted black and white, and Mackenzie had a roll of fine chain. It was pretty dark, and we fumbled about the beach for some time. Ultimately the soldier stopped and drove one of the poles in among the shingle and Deverill went on, carrying one end of the chain. Mackenzie went on hands and knees to watch the chain as it uncoiled. After a while he called to Deverill, and though I could see nothing his feet ceased on the shingle and the chain stopped unwinding.

"See anything?" called Mackenzie.

There was a rattling of stones in the distance, and after a time Deverill's voice called back:

"Nothing doing."

Several times Mackenzie altered the position of the striped pole, which was, so to speak, our base, and the same performance was repeated. The exchanges between the two were almost monosyllabic, quick and sharp too, as though they were afraid of being overheard; and once when Deverill made more than his usual noise on the shingle Mackenzie swore under his breath at him. It was all a mystery to me, and I was never requested for the figures in my hand. Once, too, Mackenzie's quick ear detected some alien sound, and he bade me lie down and stopped Deverill's advance by a sharp pull on the chain, without a word. We lay down and waited, and presently I heard the slow footsteps of some one go by, up above, on the promenade. After he had passed the work went on harder than ever, and from Mackenzie's subdued but vehement exclamations I gathered that he was both anxious and impatient. The night was wearing on. Eventually success came suddenly. Mackenzie had stopped the unrolling chain, which I now knew was marked into yards and feet, like a gigantic tape measure, and in response to this action, which was a wordless question to Deverill, the latter's voice came back to us:

"Rather! What *do* you think?"

The very tone told me he had got something.

"What is it?" Mackenzie called quite loudly, eagerly.

"A very tidy boat winch and the rest of it."

"Got 134 on the paper, Abercromby?" the man beside me asked.

"I have," I replied.

After that they seemed to tumble on things and never once looked back. I didn't in the least know what it all meant, but I knew the figures worked out straight.

They seemed to be satisfied with their work at that place, and Mackenzie was in a mighty haste to be off elsewhere. We made along the road by the sea till we came to another road that led inland, up a slight incline, and here they hunted about for a time for something; but without result so far as I could gather. The darkness seemed to be the trouble: it was some markings that they were hunting for. Mackenzie was extraordinarily eager, going down on his hands and knees on the road, and even crawling from point to point with his face peering in the very dust. But neither seemed able to pick up any sign of what they were seeking, and in the end the search was abandoned.

The car put us down soon after daybreak at a Folkestone hotel, and after a wash Mackenzie ordered us to bed. There was no more, he said, to be done till later, and for what lay before us we had best seek some rest now, when we could get it. How things fared with my companions I don't know, but for myself I was no sooner in bed than I fell fast asleep.

At breakfast, which we had together at nine

in a private room, Mackenzie lifted something of the veil of darkness that shrouded things. But he wasn't, even by nature, a communicative sort of man.

"I don't want to *pry*," I said, "but if I might know whether it is France or Germany. France, as you know, is the old ally of Scotland."

He saw I was a bit piqued at being left an outsider in their deliberations and discoveries, and laughed.

"I was rather an ass not to guess the thing at once," he said. "But it was such a confoundedly big programme, even for that land of magnificent ideas."

"What land?" I asked.

"Germany," he answered. "Ever since 1870 Germany has suffered from swollen head. No nation in history has achieved a bigger military reputation on anything like a single achievement, as she has."

"But—Calais," I reminded him.

He lit a cigar, nodding.

"That's it—the bigness of the programme. It was to be France first, and then England, one after the other. Mind you, it was quite a good scheme in itself, and would stand on its own merits; but I dare say the invasion from Calais was deliberately chosen for the sake of its grandeur. Napoleon wanted to do it, you remember, and failed. What could more blazon the military genius of Germany, and its present

ruler, than the accomplishment of something in which the great Napoleon failed?"

"You speak in the past tense," I said. "The scheme *was*. Am I to understand——"

"You are," said Mackenzie grimly. "I have an idea myself that if the time comes when the Germans, according to their programme, make a push for Calais they will find something thrust in between it and them that will take some shifting."

I could not think what this could be at the time and almost thought that he had referred to the fleet, and had intended to say 'between it and us.' I let the saying pass, however, and indeed he gave me no time to interpose with further questions on the point.

"But," he went on, "though that thrust at Calais will never be allowed to succeed, I own that I should like to lay by the heels the men who know that we know."

"They will have already reported the loss of the drawings," I said.

"Perhaps, and perhaps not; but that is not the important point. The important point for their consideration, Abercromby, is one that I dare swear gives them a mighty lot of thinking at the present moment: did they lose the drawings to one who could read their meaning."

"Surely," I said, "my visit to the Whitehall Office, of which I believe they knew, would settle that?"

"They assuredly watched for you there, but we may take it as certain that as no immediate action by the office followed on your visit they would infer, if indeed they had not ways and means of ascertaining the fact, that the office had failed to penetrate the sinister significance of the paper. You see that? Well, their next step would be to watch for you here on the spot. Not till they saw you here could they know, definitely, that the game was all up with their scheme. *Then* they would have to report the fact to their authorities. But you can bet your life they don't want to do that, as long as they aren't sure."

I began to see things.

"You think they are here, in Folkestone?" I asked.

"Not a doubt of it," Mackenzie remarked.

"Then they will have seen me, and know their game is up!"

"It is probable that they know you are here by this time, though they didn't know you were yesterday, at 3 p.m., yet——"

"You are very precise," I interjected. "How do you know?"

"It was about 3 o'clock yesterday that you visited that barber's shop, was it not? If they had known, you would not have left it alive. But that is not the important thing either. They have got to see if they cannot dispose of you, my friend, *before* you have persuaded any responsible

person to believe your story, and understand their drawing."

With that he tossed the stump of his cigar through the open window, and took a chair beside Deverill and myself.

"It's only fair," he went on, "that you should clearly understand how things are. There is now no question of any danger to the country, at any rate through a surprise attack. That being so, your work is ended—your mission accomplished—and it is only fair to tell you, Abercromby, that, if you cared, you may honourably wash your hands of the whole business, here and now."

At that Deverill, who had been lying back in a lazy attitude, lifted his head and regarded me curiously; Mackenzie himself scrutinised a picture on the wall. I understood their thought. They knew the dangers through which I had come perhaps better than I myself did; and, as no man's luck lasts a lifetime, they were offering me a chance to withdraw from a dangerous game at its most dangerous moment. Why shouldn't I, as he suggested, wash my hands of the business here and now? It was quite enough for me that I had smashed their scheme. So I was thinking when Mackenzie began to pace the room again. It might be enough for me to have smashed their project; it was clearly not enough for him. The instinct of the hunter was strong in that man—he wanted to smash the *men* as well as the

scheme. I watched him as he paced to and fro restlessly. I think he forgot his last words to me, forgot even my presence, in his own thoughts. He became tremendously excited in a queer suppressed way.

"If I could only take them," he said; and again, "I want to take them."

Deverill, too, watched him. The sailor bent towards me.

"What he wants," he whispered, "is to dispose of that gang before they can report the miscarriage of the plan. Then the plan would be pigeon-holed, as a settled part of their big campaign, and when the chosen hour struck would be extracted and followed out to the letter. They would never know that we knew! You see what that would mean for us?"

I nodded. He continued, rapidly and eagerly:

"To-day is probably the last day on which he can hope to get them. They would have cleared out of the country now but for their belief in our invincible stupidity. But it's unlikely we can catch them in the time without your help; and he's unwilling to ask you to enter into the dangerous game—you've risked so much already—and what is to come yet is the most dangerous of all."

On that I made up my mind.

"I wouldn't be out of the game for anything," I said. "They have hunted me so long

that it will be great fun to hunt them for a change."

Mackenzie, standing looking out of the window, heard my words and wheeled round.

"You mean it?" he asked. "You understand?"

"I believe so," I answered. "You want to use me as a bait for them."

Deverill seized and shook my hand.

"The bait," said Mackenzie, "doesn't usually get much fun out of the hunt, and is sometimes eaten up; but you know, Abercromby, your luck has been good—better I think than you dream of—and Deverill and I will now be behind you, to ease the strain."

It was easy to see that he was immensely pleased with my decision. Deverill, who seemed to have been waiting merely till I decided, now left the room, apparently on some prearranged business. It was then close on ten o'clock. Mackenzie, at first with the air of talking to pass the time, began to question me as to what I knew of the men for whom he was setting his trap.

"The man," he remarked, "that I want to lay by the heels is a fellow called Hohenstaffel."

I was sorry to disappoint him.

"There isn't anyone in it of that name so far as I know," I replied. "There is a fat man named Roon, and a man with a pitted face whose name I never heard, and another, a Jew, whom they called Dewinski."

"Perhaps it's only a matter of names," Mackenzie continued. "This Jew of yours, what was he like?"

"A small slight man," I answered, "with clear-cut features, silky beard, fine teeth and a red smiling mouth."

Mackenzie was engaged in selecting a cigar, and I observed that his hand shook.

"That is my man," he said. "Hohenstaffel was his name then. And you have been as close to him as I am to you at this minute!"

I laughed.

"Close enough to hit him."

The soldier was lighting up as I said this.

"Abercromby," he said, turning a pair of glittering eyes on me, "I am not an envious man, but I envy you that blow."

"Oh," I answered, "if it's any satisfaction to you, I hit him hard enough."

"Satisfaction!" He sighed gently. "That man got my best friend five years in a fortress on a *false* charge of espionage, merely to show his efficiency as an agent. That's years ago. Now he is the master mind in this affair, and in many others."

"What are you going to do?" I asked, excited.

He got up without answering my question.

"In about half an hour," he said, "an old lady in a Bath chair will call at the hotel and ask for you. I want you to accompany her on her

promenades. You will do what she tells you to do, but as she's very deaf you need not suppress your language, nor, on the other hand, need you attempt polite conversational remarks."

He left me alone then; but his amusement enlightened me as to his scheme, and I saw in the very lightness of his tone the delight with which the man of action welcomed the hour of big things.

When I had changed out of my clergyman's clothes into the grey flannels Deverill had procured for me, and had descended to the front door of the hotel, the lady was there waiting for me. Although I very well knew things were not what they seemed, the disguises were so good that I could not tell which was Mackenzie and which was Deverill. One, of course, did not see much of the occupant of the chair, but it seemed impossible to believe that the dejected creature who began to pull the chair along the Sandgate road could be either of them; and it was not till the melancholy attendant allowed the chair to bump into a tree near the Westcliff Hotel, and drew from the occupant a deep and very unlady-like reproof, that I recognised the voice of Mackenzie. That blunder was not repeated; but it was lucky no one saw or heard.

So it was that we began to throw our line for the big fish we were out to land. I, who was the bait, walked by the side of the vehicle.

Mackenzie was all eyes, interested like any invalid old lady in everything and every one. But I knew that, unlike such old ladies, underneath the apron of the chair he held a revolver in his right hand.

In this fashion we made a tour of the principal streets in the upper part of the town. I think both of them enjoyed the business almost for its own sake, Deverill certainly did, and as for Mackenzie, he being I suppose so hopeful of success, there were times when his humour was obvious, as, for instance, when he made us linger on the pavement in front of a shop in Tontine Street, to the manifest inconvenience of the public, while he admired the ladies' garments displayed in the windows. Later in the morning we found ourselves on the Leas where there were many people strolling about, or sunning themselves on the seats.

In the afternoon the promenade was repeated, except that then we covered new ground, taking our way in the direction of Sandgate, always watchful for any indication of being observed or followed by any kind of human being.

Two days passed in this fashion, Mackenzie and Deverill leaving me at the hotel, and later returning in their normal characters to spend the night at the same hotel with me. In the whole time none of us got an eye on the slightest indication that we were being watched. Once indeed I thought I detected traces of the presence of

something unusual in the sudden manner in which Deverill once pulled up the Bath chair. It was on the Sandgate hill, near a little steep lane that led on to the main road and down which a troop of boys were coming, some school, as I saw, for all of them wore the same striped caps of red and white. Both men's eyes were fixed on the boys, and I wondered.

"What is it?" I asked Mackenzie quickly.

He reassured me quietly.

"Nothing," he said. "Deverill and I used to wear those caps, years ago. They are boys from our own old school."

The boys passed us, engaged in their own world, and I am quite sure they never saw us. That was on our first afternoon. By the end of the third afternoon I think we all three began to be rather hopeless. It looked as if our men had taken fright, and scuttled. Deverill and I were for throwing things up, and even Mackenzie himself was somewhat shaken in his purpose. Besides, good impostors as both men were it was impossible to maintain this play-acting for long without something going awry. That day there had been a contretemps in the Castle Hill Avenue. We had occasion to cross that quiet road, and while the Bath chair was in the middle of it a motor suddenly whizzed round the corner, and, in a second, was almost on the top of us.

Perhaps Mackenzie's nerves were, like my own, wearing rather thin with our perpetual

alertness. Anyway, up went his revolver and the chauffeur, his face a mixture of horror and surprise, managed to pull up within a few feet of us. Incidents such as these threatened our disguise. An old lady in a Bath chair who pulled up motors with a revolver could scarcely hope to escape notoriety. We were all three rather crest-fallen after that, but Mackenzie was white and dangerously quiet. It is strange now to look back, and know that while we thus diligently fished for our men they were there all the while, unseen, as diligently fishing as ourselves. They, however, used a net. If not better sportsmen they were more successful, as you are presently to see.

That same evening there was, in addition to the usual band, to be a well-known soprano who would sing on the bandstand at the west end of the Leas. The placards announcing her appearance were everywhere, and as the evening promised to be still and warm we conceived the idea of making what would be our last throw among the big crowd which was certain to assemble. On that understanding we parted about five o'clock. They were to call for me at eight.

It was shortly before eight when a waiter came into the smoking-room to inform me that the lady in the chair was waiting for me outside. I knew as I descended the steps that something was afoot, they were in such haste to be getting on. For obvious reasons we did not go in for

conversational exchanges on these promenades, and even in the least frequented roads it was I, and not Mackenzie, who gave the necessary directions to Deverill in his capacity as chairman. However, I noticed that we did not take the nearest way to the Leas, and judged that from something they had learned the plan had been altered. I would have asked Mackenzie about it, only that cautious man, evidently to be quite in character with the part he played as an invalid dame out in the evening air, had the hood up. So I walked on by his side, patiently waiting till we reached some part sufficiently quiet to make questioning possible.

Deverill was pulling the chair along at a pace that amused me, for it was quite out of keeping with the careful, valetudinarian aspect given to our equipage by the raised hood, which suggested much fragility in the occupant. When, however, we had come to a quiet road between high walls, bordered with trees, and with nothing in sight save a motor-car in the distance, I could restrain my curiosity no longer, seeing indeed no need to restrain it. Calling on Deverill to halt, I pressed back the hood of the chair and bent over with my question as to why we were going in a direction exactly contrary to that arranged. But my question died on my lips as I looked at the occupant of the chair. It was not Mackenzie. It was a man whose face, in spite of the shaven chin, I recognised—the clear-cut features, the

eyes, the carmine lips, parted in a grin, and showing the broken front teeth.

"Dewinski!" I cried involuntarily, and as Henschel had cried the name that first night.

I had a second in which to hear his reply.

"Yais," said Dewinski as he rose with something in his hand that he lifted over his head.

Then something crashed down, and consciousness left me.

When I came to myself again the first sensation I recall was simply a dull throbbing in my head. Something queer had happened to it. The intolerable heat lodged in my brain had, I thought, softened the hard osseous skull; it had become yielding and pliable, so that my head was visibly dilating and contracting in the same fashion as the heart does. Then I became aware that I was lying on the ground, and was feebly thankful to be on the ground, for I was convinced that my head had dilated, on the whole, more than it had contracted, and was now of such dimensions as to be beyond unassisted support.

When consciousness again returned I was lying on my back in utter darkness. A great sense of sickness was on me, and I was stiff, numb and cold. At first the weak efforts my mind fitfully made to connect the present with the past were so painful and harassing that I abandoned the attempt, and lay still, staring up from the ground. The place in which I lay was

in impenetrable darkness and silence. I tried to lift a hand to see if I could touch anything, and discovered that both hands were strapped to my body. By and by I heard a cock crow, and then a dog barked; but both sounds were remote and thin as from a long distance. The next thing that impressed itself on my senses was a ray of light I discerned high over head. For a long time I gazed at this, until I had formulated from it the inferences that there was a roof there and that somewhere beyond it there was daylight. Then I must have gone to sleep.

Some one kicked me in the ribs.

"Get up, you English swine."

I was startled into complete consciousness. The light was streaming in from an unshuttered window, and showed me three men, of whom I knew two, Dewinski, and the fat man Roon. The other was a stranger to me, a young man in a chauffeur's cap and linen overalls. They raised me from the ground, and I was propped up on a bench against the wall. We were in a big wooden shanty. In the centre of the floor there was a circular opening, very much like a well, only larger. Two very big beams in the roof supported a fly wheel, from which a double length of rope hung over the well-like opening. The whole place had an aspect of dilapidation, and an odour of decay and fustiness assailed my nostrils. Recent events came back to me, and the only thing I was uncertain about was the

question as to how long I had been in their hands.

They left me undisturbed for a few moments. I imagine they were savouring the taste of having, at last, run me to earth, and were finding it mighty sweet. The manner in which Roon regarded me out of his small, pig-like eyes was certainly baleful and malevolent enough, but his satisfaction was evident from the way in which he rubbed his fat hands. Dewinski was, of course, smiling, albeit not so prettily as of yore, and in his look there was no symptom of anything but benevolence. He waved his hand as he spoke.

"It was about that little matter of the paper we wanted to see you," he said.

There was something in that speech that struck me as humorous; the contrast between the mild desire expressed by the words and the violence they had used in order to obtain the interview. The mincing tone, however, the manner in which he "mouthed" his words, and his general aspect, so like that of a highly polished shop-walker at his most "gentlemanly" moment, warned me that this was Dewinski in his most venomous mood.

"I haven't got it with me," I answered, as blandly as it was possible for me with my aching head.

He glimmered at me with narrowed eyes.

"We know that. We took the liberty of——"

"Don't mention it," I said.

"You haf opened the packet"—Dewinski progressed a step—"and will understand our anxiety to get it back."

"I did open it," I admitted.

"And——?" He was very keen.

I left the question unanswered save by a shrug of the shoulder which I had picked up from our friends the French. This forced him to put a direct question:

"What did you think of it, doctor?"

"Very clever indeed," I answered.

"Humph! clever? What do you mean by clever?"

"For a small boy, it was well drawn," I conceded.

"*Ach, damn!*" Dewinski stamped his foot.

The veneer, never of the thickest, was wearing thin. Of course he knew well enough that I had understood the significance of the thing; all this was merely a method of approach to the real question, which was as to whether I had got anyone else to believe the incredible purpose wrapped up in that drawing. It was not in his nature to put that question to me directly. His methods were sinuous and crooked, because his nature, from whatever causes, was sinuous and crooked; in this lay the secret of his success and his failure.

On the other hand, a dilemma that was very real confronted me and made this preliminary

sparring with words not unwelcome, since it gave me time to think. My life hung on the thinnest possible hair. If Dewinski thought that no one else shared the secret with me I was, of course, as good as dead. And equally was I lost if he thought that several now knew it, for though the plot could not be saved I could not imagine myself receiving their forgiveness on that account. But suppose he believed that only *one* other, and that an old lady in a Bath chair, knew of the plot! If from her, or through her, he could recover the drawing what matter if, after my final disappearance she talked of German spies and plots—who would pay attention to such ravings, from such a source?

I recognised therefore that the old invalid lady in the Bath chair was my trump—indeed my only card. Did Dewinski know the real identity of the occupant of that chair? There was evidently something that troubled him greatly, as he paced now to and fro—something he did not know but wanted to get from me without allowing me to see the drift of it, and so prevent my giving him a reply that would be dictated by what was to my own advantage.

The other two men now seated themselves on a packing-case near the wall, and began to smoke, keeping a keen interest in us all the while.

“Perhaps,” said Dewinski stepping before me, “you have shown the cleverness of the little drawing to many peoples?”

"To about half a dozen," I answered.

"And——?"

How much depended on my answer! I took the plunge and trusted in my reasoning.

"They were all fools," I answered frankly. "Only one of them saw how clever it was."

"And who was this one?"

"It was, of course, a woman," I answered.

"Pah! a woman——" his tone was contemptuous. "Do you think, doctor, I'd believe such a bull-and-cock story?"

My reply to this was again that useful shrug of the shoulder which says anything, and commits one to nothing. He resumed his sentry-like walk, and I began to suspect that in his last question we had approached the heart of things, the identity of the occupant of the Bath chair. My respect for Mackenzie increased. For three days these men had watched our little procession in the streets, and had lighted on no flaw in its *bona fides*! It was a stroke of pure luck, of course, that they had not seen the incident with the chauffeur in the Castle Hill Avenue. Remembering that incident now, I understood Mackenzie's pallor afterwards. Still it was not all good luck, and how he and Deverill contrived to cover their traces in coming and going I could not imagine. What were he and Deverill doing now? It was pretty certain they were busy; but could they be in time to help me? What had they to work on? An overturned and abandoned Bath

chair! There were others besides themselves who knew how to obliterate their traces.

"Who was this woman?" It was Dewinski again.

"My mother," I answered with promptitude.

"And," he continued, "this other woman in the Bath chair you haf been——"

"That was not another woman," I interrupted. "It was my mother."

"Ah!" His eyes were on me keenly. Distinctly, he was on the target now.

"Yes," I explained. "You see after that exciting time you gave us up in Scotland her nerves went wrong, and she was ordered change of scene and rest. We hardly expected to run across you again, down here."

He kept staring at me all the time. I wished he wouldn't. He kept it up even after I had finished speaking, which was the worst of all.

"I'd like for to see your mother," he said finally, "to—to express my sorrows."

"Very nice of you," I replied. "I know she'd like to meet you."

Something in this pleased the fellow. He shook his head in a deprecating negative.

"*Ach*, no, doctor!" He thought I had said too much perhaps.

"On such a mission—yes," I assured him.

And his face fell again.

"*Lieber Gott!* I will have to zee her, ze old lady."

"Go by all means," I encouraged him.

"*Ach*, no! But she will perhaps come here. And perhaps bring with her ze leetle paper I lost?"

Was it only the paper after all? Had he then no suspicion of Mackenzie? This was better than I could hope for.

"Too far," I said.

He was wary.

"How do you know how far it is?"

"She is practically an invalid, you know."

"But the Bath chair, doctor, would make it easy."

"She won't come."

"What! Not to save you from—from an accident? *Ach!* ze cruel, heartless one. It is a strange mother you have, then!"

This was maddening. Confound the fellow; how much *did* he know?

"I couldn't ask her," I said. "This is merely an inconvenience to me."

"Inconvenience!" he cried grimly, his whole manner changing. He turned to the young man on the packing case. "Carl, show to the good doctor ze inconvenience of ze place!"

The man addressed stared blankly for a moment, and, then comprehending the gesture Dewinski made to him, picked up a brick from the coping of the well and, as the theatrical Jew lifted a hand, he dropped it over. After a long interval a far-away splash came back. Dewinski took out his watch.

"You are that brick," he said. "You go 'plomp' down ze mine shaft if by evening at seven you haf not sent a leetle note of invitation to bring your mother—and ze leetle paper."

He and Roon began to prepare for departure. It did not escape me that they looked carefully from the window before leaving. Dewinski turned at the door:

"Think not you can escape from Carl," he warned me.

"We have met before," said Carl, bowing to me.

I looked at him vaguely.

"In Scotland," he explained.

Then I remembered. He was the fellow who had so nearly potted me at the cairn, by the Knock hill.

"To be sure," I said, "at the shooting season, wasn't it?" A sufficiently foolish remark; but I was not so foolish as to recall to remembrance the fact that I had once before escaped from Carl.

CHAPTER XIII

THIS was the letter which, later in the day, by reiterated threats, Dewinski induced me to write:

“DEAR MOTHER,

“My absence must have alarmed you greatly. The fact is I met with a little accident which seems likely to confine me to this shanty for eternity. As the three kind friends who helped me with my accident are now even more anxious about you than about me they have persuaded me to write and assure you of a warm reception, should you come up here to satisfy yourself as to my present condition and comfort in this shanty of mine. It will, I think, be an easy journey if you use the Bath chair. Some one will call at ten o'clock to-morrow to show you the way.

“Your affectionate son,

“HUGH.

“P.S.—Don't forget the drawing I left with you.”

Dewinski was delighted with this letter, and I was not displeased with it myself. It is true at first he seemed dubious over the word "shanty," his knowledge of English not being extensive enough for him to know that, as I explained to him, it was simply a homely word for "a little cottage." And again, when he objected that this little cottage did not belong to me, and that therefore the word "mine" was not suitable, I had to explain that this was an idiomatic expression commonly used where hospitality has reached the pitch of making a guest feel quite "at home," so to speak. There seemed to be nothing else in the note that caught his attention, and he was delighted with it, explaining the idiom to the other two, who could not read English. The word "persuaded" tickled them greatly. My own satisfaction had no outward manifestation.

At once the young man departed to deliver the letter. It was then about seven o'clock. In imagination I followed the course of events that would ensue when my young German friend handed in that letter at the hotel. Suppose he had been instructed by Dewinski to deliver it personally to Mrs. Abercromby, and await a reply! Then, indeed I was lost! But I had calculated otherwise. "Mrs. Abercromby" was the one person who knew and credited my story. It was unlikely that in such circumstances so clever a man as Dewinski would not see the danger of sending an interviewer who spoke

English with a German accent. No; I was sure his directions were to drop the letter in the letter box and clear out before any questions could be asked.

What would follow then? The letter would be removed with others, and taken to the hotel office for delivery. But there was no Mrs. Abercromby at the hotel. Would the girl clerk treat it as an advance letter for an intending guest? That would be bad! But if she took it for a note to me—and I had done my best to confuse the gender of the prefix to “Abercromby” on the envelope—it would be stuck in the rack, perhaps in the hall, where Mackenzie would see a note addressed to me in my own handwriting. It would be strange if he did not get possession of it. In any event it was almost certain that in my absence he would have made repeated inquiries at the office, and almost certainly on the arrival of such a note, by personal messenger, would be consulted about it.

What would Mackenzie make of it? He would at once know I had been taken by Dewinski and two others, and was confined in a shanty that covered a mine shaft sunk to find coal—there were several of these in Kent, and some were in German hands—that this mine shaft was “up” somewhere, and within easy reach of Folkestone. Such details he was told in my letter. But would he assume from the fact that the letter was addressed to a lady who used a

Bath chair that our disguise had not been penetrated? Or would he, as I desired him to, understand from "the warm reception" and the "anxious about you," that I had some dubiety as to whether or not they knew, but was inclined to believe that the Bath chair made the safest method of approach?

For the life of me I could not gather whether Dewinski knew or not. That evening he remained in the place till late, and at times it seemed to me that his amusement and air of satisfaction betokened more than the hope of capturing an old lady on the morrow. To be sure, he imagined he was deceiving me, but even so it appeared to me that only a double bluff would warrant so much complacency. Was he, then, merely *pretending* to believe in my mother, and all the while knowing whom to expect next day? He spared me little in the way of jeers while waiting the return of the messenger; but carefully as I listened, and provocative as I tried to be, he let nothing slip that could give me an inkling.

When ultimately the man returned they tied me up again and the other two departed for the night, leaving the good Carl to keep guard. That fellow, once I was secure, did not trouble much about me, but lay down on a bench on the far side and was soon asleep. Very gladly would I have slept myself had my thoughts allowed me. I have read of condemned prisoners who on the night before their execution slept soundly and

ate hearty breakfasts on the morrow, but although I was under no illusion as to what, short of some miracle from Mackenzie, would happen to me on the morrow, sleep did not visit my eyes. Perhaps it was the faint hope of rescue that kept me wakeful—that, and also the fear that I might have been made the instrument for getting Mackenzie and Deverill to run their heads into a noose prepared for them. I no longer cherished any hope of escaping from the good Carl a second time. He was sound enough asleep, but I was securely trussed up, and though he slept, it was with a pistol beside his hand.

And so the slow hours dragged on.

I must have been in that semi-conscious state which lies on the borders of sleep when there came to my ears a sound that, at first, I thought was but my memory working in my dreams. It was the sound of some one whistling the dance music from *Henry VIII*. Of course I was startled. Once or twice in the evening I had heard whistling from passers-by—farm hands going home from their work possibly. But that air! It was an extraordinary coincidence. How the tables had been turned since I had whistled it that morning in St. Andrews when Margarita Thompson had come down and taken me in! And in the midst of these thoughts the whistling recommenced. This time the air ceased pregnantly just at the point at which I used to go astray in it, and then it was resumed, the phrase

first rendered correctly and then taken up again according to my variation. I could not believe my ears! There was but one person in the world who was capable of sending just that message to me, and she was far away. Was she? But how could she come to be there?

I tried to take up the air myself, but my lips were so parched and dry that at first I could scarce hear myself. Then Carl started out of sleep at the sound; as by instinct his hand went to his weapon, and sitting up he covered me with it, while he listened.

"What is that?" he cried angrily, for he was afraid.

The thin pale light of early dawn was coming in from the unshuttered window. I was stiff and chill, but somehow from the time I heard that whistling I no longer took a gloomy view as to my prospects. So I told him it was no doubt some man on his way to work. But he did not again go to sleep.

Later in the morning some food was brought me, and the other two came and talked to the young man while I ate. I took comfort from the fact that there appeared to be only three of them. Had Dewinski planned some treachery on Mackenzie there would, I thought, have been a greater show of force. But for the purpose of disposing of a tied-up prisoner, an old lady and a decrepit chairman the three were quite adequate. Roon was meanwhile busy by himself.

At first I did not give any heed to the silent fat man, being more concerned in attempting to overhear what Dewinski was saying to the young man; but when my eyes did go in Roon's direction what I saw left me no doubt as to their immediate intentions: he was fastening heavy weights of iron to lengths of rope. There were three lengths of rope. As he laid them on the packing case that stood beside the well it was not difficult to tell for whom and for what purpose they were destined. The cold-blooded orderliness with which these preparations were made began to shake my nerve again on the question as to whether they knew who their impending visitor really was; for I could hardly bring myself to believe that they would be ready to take thus almost wantonly, as it seemed to me, the lives of an invalid lady and an inoffensive man who wheeled her chair.

By and by the good Carl departed, obviously to act as guide, as had been arranged in the letter; and I was glad of it, for the increasing uncertainty as to whether Dewinski was to take Mackenzie, or Mackenzie take Dewinski, was more than I could much longer endure.

As the morning wore on Dewinski showed symptoms of uneasiness. He was continually going out and coming in. Roon was more phlegmatic, and went on with whatever he was doing with complete stolidity. Neither of them

gave the least heed to me. I suspect they regarded me as now negligible. Ultimately Dewinski, after looking at his watch, said something to the fat man which I could not overhear, and both looked at me. Roon had one of the weighted ropes in his hand at the moment, and it struck me suddenly that my last hour had come. It is curious that I had not thought this might come at any time; my thoughts had been running so much on the approaching conflict with Mackenzie, and also, as I have said, that whistling in the early dawn from Margarita—if it had been she—had, in a vague way so encouraged me that this sudden opening of the abyss at my feet made a truly horrible moment. It was not so much, I think, against death that I revolted then—for long now I had been compelled to envisage the probability of getting knocked out in this affair that there was no shock in the thought of it to me—what I revolted at was death at this precise moment, when the curtain was just rising on the last scene of the last act. It struck me as cruel, wanton and grotesquely unfair that my life should be taken then, and that then I should go suddenly down to extinction, like a lighted match dropped into a bucket of water.

But even as they got ready Dewinski, with a snigger, drew Roon back and whispered something to him. Roon considered what was said and then nodded approval. Together they lifted

me over to a chair by the window and propped me in it.

"There!" said Dewinski. "Ze goot leedle boy vill vatch vor ze approach of Mamma!"

I had perceived that his English was not so good in his exalted moods. Although certainly not prompted by kindness the respite was grateful to me. Assuredly I did not build any hope of rescue from it. Dewinski was too confident and self-assured for that. It looked as if he had got "the drop" on us, and knew it.

The country I saw from that window was in extent very circumscribed, for the shanty stood in a cup-shaped depression that did not allow me to see above the undulations of the fields in front. A road that evidently led over the Downs came into sight about a mile away, and descended on our side, like a white ribbon on green fields, and passed on a few hundred yards from the shanty. The shanty itself stood a little way up the north side of the depression, and a rough and grass-grown cart track left the road at the bottom of the hollow in its direction. There were no houses in sight. If not remote it appeared to be a lonely country-side, for while I watched from the window I saw no traffic on the road, nor indeed heard any sound, save the far-away penetrating cry of a sheep, from the high downs. Dewinski and Roon seated themselves on the turf slope in front of the door and sat watching that road. It was a fine still day.

I began to hope, as time passed, that they were not coming. The silent country-side took on an ominous aspect. Up there it seemed to me that Dewinski would have men set to trap them, once they had descended from the summit, men who would be lurking in little hollows in the bare hill-side, and who would prevent either escape or rescue. I knew that they must come unaccompanied, otherwise Carl would never lead them to the place. It was, I thought, equally certain that Dewinski would post some of his gang to see that they were also unfollowed. So it appeared to me that the expedition could never be anything more than a forlorn hope.

Then, even as I watched, I saw Dewinski level a pair of binoculars on the hills, and, a little after, I saw a black and moving dot, high up on the chalky road. By and by the figures became distinct, and I saw the thing, in which I knew Mackenzie sat, like a perambulator slowly moving down, guided by the careful Deverill. Were they not both children! There was something at once ridiculous, pathetic and heroic in the sight. They were simply walking straight, if not unconsciously, into the lions' den. I longed to cry out a warning, and struggled vainly to loosen the cords that bound me immovably at that window, now understanding the refinement of cruelty that had prompted my respite and placed me there. But I was quite helpless, and must needs gaze in a horrid fascination at the approaching tragedy.

When, however, they had come up to the gap in the hedge through which the cart track to the shanty passed I saw that it was the good Carl who was pulling the chair, the good Carl, who was thus placed directly between Dewinski and Roon and Mackenzie and Deverill, who was behind the chair, pushing. That struck me as not so bad in the way of a manœuvre. Up to a point it eliminated the good Carl, and ensured immunity from frontal attack. The numbers might be held to be equal so long as that position was maintained, while Mackenzie shielded by Carl, and Deverill behind both, had, I saw, an immensely stronger strategic defence.

Nothing could well seem more natural than that little procession as it moved towards the shanty across the turf, yet something in it—no one now will ever know what it was—raised suspicion in Dewinski, that is supposing he did not know all the time, which is uncertain. I saw his hand come behind and whip out the gun he was never without. But he kept it there, never showing it while he seemed to have his eyes fixed on the party that stole slowly nearer. Suddenly he shouted out something to Carl in a loud voice. The chair was instantly wheeled round to the left, thus Mackenzie, seated in it with the hood up, was made helpless, and Deverill was exposed.

I heard Dewinski's shot, and saw the sailor go down. At the same moment Carl collapsed quietly on the grass, like a tired man, exhausted

by his labours. Roon had now joined in the fusillade, and I saw splinters fly off the back of the silly Bath chair, and imagined Mackenzie must have been shot in the first volley. It was amazing to see with what simplicity the tables had been turned. Meanwhile there had not been so much as a single shot from the other side! Deverill lay face down where he had pitched forward on the grass, with the German youth in front lying on his back, the silent chair standing in the open, white wood showing where it had been splintered by the bullets.

No defeat could be more decisive. Dewinski and Roon, however, were taking no chances. Both stood watching, ready to begin again at the slightest movement from below. But none came. I am sure they had not desired the thing to be done just like this; lonely as the country was they would have preferred less shooting.

Then even as I watched I heard, from some direction I couldn't see, the *crack crack* of a gun, and within a second of each other Dewinski went over, and Roon pitched awkwardly to the earth. Dewinski was up again, almost instantly, on his knees, gazing around, seeking to discover whence the attack had come. *Crack* went the sound again, and the pistol spun from his grasp. Looking wildly round about him the Jew caught sight of me at my window, and, scrambling to his feet, ran clumsily but swiftly to the door. Perhaps he thought that somehow I had succeeded in

freeing myself, and had thus taken them in the rear in the very moment of their triumph, or more likely he was simply moved by the instinct of a wild beast, which when wounded attacks the nearest living thing in sight.

Before he reached the door the hidden gun spat at him again, and he staggered momentarily, but recovered and pushed on like a man fighting his way against a gale of wind. I knew I was helpless in his hands. He tore at me, and though his right hand was all shattered and bloody he had the strength of madness, and dragged me over towards the well of the mine shaft in the centre of the floor. As soon as I read his intentions I put up such resistance as was possible, which was very little, and I recognised that it must soon be over. Dewinski had only my weight to contend with. He put forth all his strength to hoist me up on the parapet that encircled the well, tugging at me with both hands, head thrown back, an insanity of hate in his straining eyes. Then, even while I saw his face so, some one stepped up unheard, a fist shot over my head that took Dewinski on the upturned chin. I saw both his hands go up and with a cry he went over into the dark yawning depths.

When I came to my senses Mackenzie's grim face was bending over me. He had already cut me free, but I was yet too stiff and cramped with the long-continued pressure to move.

"You weren't killed then, in the Bath chair, after all?" I said.

He shook his head as he continued rubbing at my numb arms.

"I wasn't in the Bath chair," he said.

"What!" I said, startled and amazed into almost physical activity. "Then who was? Who was in the chair?"

"I don't know who was in it," said he. "Do you think you can stand now?"

Struggling to my feet I began to make for the door, leaning on him, and heedless of the torture caused by the renewal of the circulating blood.

"Mackenzie," I cried, "there was some one in that chair. I swear it. I saw him."

He tried to steady me.

"Abercromby, old fellow, don't excite yourself. Sit down here for a minute. Come now! Whoever was in that chair is beyond help now."

"Who was it?" I cried catching at him. "Tell me!"

"I swear to you," he assured me, "I haven't the least notion."

But I was not to be turned aside. He had perforce to assist me, and together we went down the slope, and over the grass, to the chair that stood with its back towards us.

"Did you know her?" Mackenzie whispered to me when we had gazed at the occupant a moment.

I must have kept on looking at her without

reply. Know her? Who knows any one? Who knows oneself, if it comes to that. I could hardly have been said to *know* her, in any real and deep sense, till that moment. Mackenzie repeated his question.

"I didn't, till this moment. But I know her now."

Afterwards he told me that he thought my mind had become unhinged.

"Her name was Margarita Thompson," I went on as if he had asked it.

We lifted her free and laid her on the grass. There was blood on her dress; but she was not dead. A bullet had cut a furrow on her right arm, and splinters of wood had wounded her in the neck, but she soon came round when we had carried her into the house, and bathed her wounds. Deverill's was a much more serious case, although, as it had chanced, he had been much less fired at. Indeed, he had received but the one shot from Dewinski, but that had caught him, as he was wheeling round, in the left side, fracturing a rib and then ploughing a circular course till it emerged, as I found, just before reaching the spinal cord. It was a narrow thing, but his recovery, though tedious, was complete.

When we had done what we could in the way of binding up the sailor's wounds, Mackenzie went off for the car in which he had come, and which he had left at the turn of the road, and I went back to Margarita. I bothered her with

no questions then. I sat by her and waited. When I heard the car coming I took her in my arms and carried her to it. Deverill we lifted in also, and then we made our way along the Folkestone road as quickly as was possible in the circumstances.

I confess that the examination we had given to Roon and the good Carl had been perfunctory. Not much sympathy had we to spare for them. Still, when we reached Folkestone we gave notice to the authorities and a car with the police and a doctor was despatched to bring them in. Later in the day an inspector called at the hotel and informed us that, on reaching the place, they had found traces of a struggle, but none of the men. Whether they were less badly injured than we supposed, or whether they may, in the short interval, have been disposed of by one or more of the confederates who may have been posted on the downs, I cannot guess; but nothing more was seen of them.

It was the second night after this adventure that Margarita, now recovered, explained in a few words the mystery of her appearance. She was very shy about it before Mackenzie.

"If," she said, turning to him, "you have heard anything of Mr. Abercromby's adventures you will know that he needs some one by him to take care of him." Then flushing slightly for some reason I did not divine, she hurried on: "So

when I heard from him that he was again mixed up with these people, and had barely escaped from them in London, I—well, I had to come down to look after him. When I went to the hotel in Dover, and was told he had gone away in a car with two gentlemen, I feared the worst. They gave me the names of the two at the hotel, and the next day I came here.”

“Why here?” Mackenzie asked.

“Because of the drawing,” she answered. “I knew he was exploring in this direction. It was not, however, till the very day, that is last Wednesday, on which Mr. Abercromby was carried off that I succeeded in discovering you at this hotel.”

Mackenzie smiled.

“So much for our publicity campaign, Abercromby,” he said. “Why, Miss Thompson, for those three days we paraded through all the streets of Folkestone.”

“Things happen like that,” said Margarita, nodding. “I daresay I missed you often by a few yards. In the end,” she resumed, “I took a taxi and went round the hotels asking for a Mr. Abercromby. It was just a chance that he would give that name. I had very little hope; but finally I came here. They told me you had just gone out with an old lady who used a Bath chair, and while I stood on the steps an old lady in a Bath chair came to the door and asked for him. I did not know what to make of it.”

"Neither did we!" Mackenzie interjected. "It took us half an hour before we saw what had happened."

"After you had gone," Margarita continued, "I found out that there were two gentlemen staying in the hotel with whom he was acquainted. So I sent for my things and took a room to watch."

"Did you discover the connection between the two friends and the Bath chair lady?" Mackenzie here asked, which made me aware that he did not rate Margarita's perspicacity at a low level.

She shook her head, smiling.

"No," she said, "I had to be told that. It was easy to see that night that you were greatly disturbed at the disappearance of Mr. Abercromby," she went on. "At first I imagined that he had run away from you."

"What made you change your view?" Mackenzie asked.

"Well," she answered, "I think it was the *quality* of the concern you showed, if you know what I mean: it didn't seem the kind of anxiety one would expect from *them*; and Lieutenant Deverill looked too nice, and young too."

"Thank you," Mackenzie laughed.

Margarita laughed also.

"You never thought any one was watching you?" she asked.

"Oh yes, I did. Even in the midst of my—

perplexity, I observed the young lady who watched us over the top of her paper in the lounge."

"That was clever of you. What did you think? Were you afraid?"

"No," said Mackenzie. "I just thought you a young lady who was attracted by the—well, nice and young Deverill."

"That wasn't clever of you," Margarita said with affected coldness.

"Well," I said to them, "now that—will the story have a chance of progressing?"

"Captain Mackenzie disappeared the next day," she resumed. "And after he had gone that poor boy seemed unable to rest. He wandered about getting himself into a fever of restlessness."

"I went rummaging about," explained Mackenzie. "Deverill of course was upset. You see we had undertaken to protect Mr. Abercromby."

"Well," Margarita went on, "after eight last night the clerk at the hotel, who knew I was a friend of Mr. Abercromby's, came to me with a letter for him. The strange thing was that it was in his own handwriting. I told the girl this, and as the hotel people themselves were getting anxious over his disappearance I opened the note and read it. Then it seemed to me I understood the mystery of the old lady in the chair. But they could not tell me where she lived, and it

was puzzling that it should be addressed to an hotel at which you must have known she had not put up. At first I thought your mother must be in some nursing home, and that perhaps as the result of your accident you had made the mistake. So I got on the telephone, but in the end could get no trace. I was feeling beaten when on taking a seat in the lounge, I saw Lieutenant Deverill sitting alone, his head on his chest, and only looking up, but always looking up, when any one entered.

"I went over to him and said: 'Are you waiting for Mr. Abercromby's return?' He almost jumped out of his chair. I showed him the letter, and once he had made me acquainted with your expeditions through the streets in a Bath chair I understood the real meaning of the letter. As there wasn't much time to spare we routed out an official person, who was very much astonished when we questioned him as to the locality of any mine-shafts within a ten-mile radius. We got the information, however, as to the position of the only three that answered to what we sought. It was early morning when our car found the real one; but we could do nothing then, for when we stopped three or four men sauntered up, from nowhere, and passed, staring at us. Mr. Deverill pretended something had gone wrong with the engine, and I sat in the car and whistled." She looked at me.

"I heard and understood," I answered.

"We went back to the hotel, expecting to find Captain Mackenzie, and knowing, anyhow, that you were safe till the man called in the forenoon. When, however, the hours passed, and Captain Mackenzie did not appear, we did not know what to do. The obvious idea of calling in the assistance of the police did come to me, but it was clear that no police would ever have been allowed to get near enough in time to save his life. Besides there was no time now to get help from that quarter. That is how we came to attempt the rescue by ourselves. We knew from Mr. Abercromby's letter that there were only three in the house. We had of course seen more than that number ourselves, and it was chiefly for that reason we did not call in the police, for it seemed certain that all approaches would be watched for the police, or any others. Mr. Deverill thought he might with luck count on getting both of the men in the house. He made sure of the guide once we reached the top of the hill when he set him to pull, telling him that he would shoot the moment a hand was lifted from the handle of the chair. You know the rest. Captain Mackenzie, when he received the note we left with the hotel porter on the chance of his return, followed in his car in time to save us all."

Mackenzie made no reply to this. Not, it appeared presently, that he accepted it as a true statement of the case.

"I was following," he said, "one or two

trails. There was a jeweller in Hythe upon whom I put pressure, in the middle of the night. I don't believe he knew where Abercromby was, but he was afraid I wouldn't believe him if he told the truth. So the infernal scoundrel sent me on a wild-goose chase. I expect, however, that there is already an opening for a jeweller in Hythe. I heard the shooting as I tore down the hill, and they were all too busy to see me get round by the corner of the house."

He fingered in his breast pocket and drew out the little Eitel drawing. As he smoothed it out on the table before him Margarita showed her feminine curiosity.

"Have you read all its secrets?" she asked.

"I wonder!" said Mackenzie.

"The 27 above the dead lion bothered me," I remarked.

"That! It probably indicates the total number of agents they established here. The drawing is twofold. The lower half is concerned with the organisation for immediate action. The upper half shows the arranged landing places, the territory to be occupied at once, and the means of transport. The first was between Shakespeare Cliff and Hythe, the second was a line between Hythe and Whitstable, for that rock that seems to threaten the church with destruction, Miss Thompson, is really an oyster."

"And the church?" she asked.

"That," said Mackenzie, "is a German idea

of Canterbury. They would have put it in the firing line."

"And the tree?"

"The tree is an ash, as you will observe. Ashford would be extremely useful for a variety of reasons. The strong part of it is that they would have had an excellent railway system behind their lines."

"Come," I interjected here, "an excellent railway system—the South Eastern!"

"On that day," Mackenzie answered, "it would be in other hands, and would be run in other interests."

"What are the small numbers in the middle?" Margarita asked.

"They are the figures that relate to currents, depths and tides between here and Calais. Deverill knows about them." He drank off his coffee hurriedly. "That reminds me," he continued, rising, "I must go round to the hospital to see how he is settling down for the night."

There was something queerly funny in his suggestion that he needed any reminder as to seeing after his friend Deverill, for he must have been to the hospital dozens of times since that building became the centre of his interest.

When he was gone Margarita and I fell silent. I was thinking that here was an end to my adventures. When at last I came back to myself she was standing by the window, looking out over the sea. Her handkerchief was in

her right hand. I came up behind her, and she did not turn round at my approach.

"Miss Thompson," I said, "that big adventure of ours is over and done with now, and I've a very queer feeling of sadness that it is, which is a very irrational emotion; but somehow it seems to me that life, after all this, will be a very flat and unromantic business."

I waited awhile for her to comment on this; but she said nothing.

"Of course," I went on, "if—if you could think of another adventure," I wanted to say "with me"; but I was afraid. Then I saw the use to which she had been putting her wisp of a handkerchief. "What! You are crying!"

"Oh, but it is terrible—that paper, to have so much blood shed for it, a thing like that!"

"Don't think of it," I cried. "There's an end to that," little guessing, then, what blood would yet have to flow on the Menin road to Ypres before the push to Calais was finally stopped.

We stood a long while silent. My thought was that she was a strange girl to weep over the fate of those who had but sought the destruction of our country. Unless indeed it was over that boy Deverill! Yes, of course that was it! They had been thrown together in a most exciting moment, and were partners in a dangerous expedition. What other result than this could anyone expect!

"I'll be home again," she said, at length, "the day after to-morrow. It will be nice to be at home again."

"Very nice," I agreed, "very!"

"Unless——" she began.

"Unless?" I repeated.

"You were saying something about another adventure——" she reminded me. "If it is dangerous like the last——"

"It is dangerous; but it is not like the last," I answered, looking her full in the eyes.

"Well, then, of course, you will need me," said Miss Thompson; and she hid her eyes from me on my breast.

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